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Of war and peace

AT 2PM on 6 October 1973 Egyptian troops, using rubber dinghies and pontoon bridges, stormed across the Suez Canal and destroyed the Bar Lev line of fortifications, signalling the start of the long-awaited war for the liberation of Sinai. The infantry and armour offensive across the waterway — described by the Israelis as the greatest anti-tank ditch in the world — was preceded by a blitz air offensive, orchestrated by then air force chief Hosni Mubarak who sent 200 warplanes to pound Israeli positions in the desert peninsula. The Egyptian attack, which took the Israelis and the world by surprise, came at a time when Egypt was deemed incapable of acting to liberate its occupied territory. But then President Anwar El-Sadat had the courage and the vision to order the offensive. Four years later, he displayed similar courage and foresight by visiting Jerusalem to put the entire Middle East at the beginning of the long road to peace. The two decisions earned Sadat the cherished title of the "hero of war and peace." On 6 October 1981, as Sadat paraded the armed forces to celebrate the Egyptian victory, he was gunned down by Islamist militants opposed to the Camp David peace agreements he concluded with Israel in 1978. Although the majority of Arabs ostracised Egypt for signing those agreements, they remain the foundation of the ongoing peace process. When Mubarak took over, he pressed ahead with the peace offensive, a battle described as equally ferocious but already yielding fruit. Enlisting Egypt's regional clout, Mubarak provided the Palestinians with invaluable assistance in reaching the autonomy agreements with Israel. He also threw his weight behind Jordan, which concluded a peace treaty with Israel, and behind Syria, which aspires to a peace treaty on the basis of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.



October speech

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak will deliver a 30-minute speech tomorrow at 10am on the 22nd anniversary of the October War praising the armed forces for their instrumental role in the war. Mubarak will also commemorate the late President Anwar Sadat's initiative in launching the peace process which had a positive effect on the national economy and the *stability* of the whole Middle East region.

Moussa arrival

FOREIGN Minister Amr Moussa returned yesterday from New York after attending the UN's 50th Session of the General Assembly, where he presented Egypt's opening statement, reports **Inas Nour**.

Moussa went on to explain that while no reaction was *forthcoming concerning* the prospect of Egypt joining the Security Council, he stressed that expansion of the council should not be limited to developed countries. The selection, he maintained, must be based on a fair and balanced representation.

To the lighthouse?

A GRANITE bust of a female statue believed to be Hellenistic, was hauled out of the waters off Qait Bey fort yesterday to an audience of dignitaries, international media and fishermen, reports **Hala Halim**. The event marked the final stage of the third phase of a French-Egyptian search for submerged ruins of monuments once part of Pharos island, on which the lighthouse stood. Initially loath to speculate on the origin of the finds, archaeologists are now more forthcoming. "We have reason to believe that a number of the blocks found are from the lighthouse," Jean-Yves Empereur, director of the Centre D'Etudes Alexandrines and head of the excavation team, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

In the next few days some 30 pieces are expected to be brought ashore, from the 2,000 or more blocks that litter the 2.25 hectare site.

INSIDE

Recovery ends Egypt-IMF discord

As a high-level delegation leaves for Washington to attend the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank, Dr Abdel-Shakour Sha'alan — in an exclusive interview with **Ghada Ragab** — reveals that signs of an economic turnaround have prompted the IMF to reopen talks with Egypt over economic reform

A remarkable economic performance that exceeded even the most optimistic projections has signalled the end of a two-year dispute between Egypt and the IMF, and raised hopes that Egypt may soon obtain further debt relief.

An Egyptian economic delegation will meet with IMF officials in Washington next week to discuss the resumption of negotiations on the reform programme.

IMF executive director Abdel-Shakour Sha'alan told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview from Washington that a routine assessment conducted annually by IMF staff last month indicated that the Egyptian economy was showing signs of a turnaround.

Sha'alan, who represents Egypt and 12 other Arab states on the IMF's executive board, said Egypt's economic progress prompted the board to urge the fund staff and the government to reopen negotiations, cut short by policy disagreements between the two sides last year.

According to Sha'alan, the Egyptian economy has been picking up in the past year, surpassing the fund's projections when it signed the 1993 agreement for the second phase of the economic reform.

Sha'alan said the economy grew by 4.5 per cent in 1994-95, about 1.2 per cent higher than projected. Similarly, during the previous year, 1993-94, the growth rate was 3.3 per cent, about 1.3 per cent higher than forecast.

Exports, excluding cotton and oil, jumped by a staggering 60 per cent from 1993-1994 to 1994-1995, a reversal of the decline triggered by the loss of Egypt's export markets in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early nineties. Sha'alan describes the spurt in exports as "a remarkable achievement by any standards."

The fund also found strong indications that investment has picked up in 1994-95, Sha'alan said, citing an increase of 33 per cent in credit extended to the private sector and a rise of 18 per cent in imports — of which a large portion are intermediate and capital goods.

He added that Egypt has also met the targets of its privatisation programme for the past year.

"These results are extremely encouraging, and I believe they resulted from the prudent policies that were being pursued since the standby arrangement. Of course, we are hopeful that these trends will continue," Sha'alan said.

"The IMF executive board showed considerable sympathy and understanding for the policies that Egypt has been pursuing, in particular the continued retrenchment or success in the fiscal area, and has commended Egypt on its pursuit of appropriate monetary policies," he added.

After five hours of deliberations on 25 September, at the conclusion of the annual routine exercise, known as the Article IV consultations, the executive board urged the IMF staff and Egypt to resume negotiations concerning the 1993 Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreement.

The EFF lays down the framework for the second phase of the economic reforms. IMF approval of Egypt's implementation of these reforms is a prerequisite to obtain the last tranche of a 50 per cent debt write-off sanctioned by the Paris Club of creditor nations in 1991.

Sha'alan pointed out that the two sides will conduct further talks after the IMF/World Bank meetings. He said he is "hopeful" that an agreement may be imminent and that Egypt may soon obtain the $4 billion debt write-off held up by its dispute with the IMF.

The EFF has been deadlocked since February 1994, when the fund refused to put its seal of approval on the policies pursued by Egypt during the first six months of the agreement, arguing that reform policies had failed to generate economic growth and employment.

The IMF's advice was to devalue the pound to promote exports, which would in turn increase investments and accelerate growth. The government refused to devalue the pound, arguing that a higher import bill and inflation resulting from devaluation would offset its benefits. However, it continued all other reform plans.

Sha'alan declined to comment on the devaluation debate, arguing that the foreign exchange system cannot be viewed in isolation from other factors influencing growth and development. However, he noted:

"The performance of exports shows that the exchange rate is competitive. Otherwise we could not have increased non-oil, non-cotton exports by 60 per cent." The Egyptian delegation, which arrives in Washington tomorrow to attend the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank taking place from 10-12 October, includes Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning Kamal El-Ganzouri, Minister of Economy Mahmoud Mohamed, Minister of Public Sector and Administrative Development Atef Ebeid, Minister of State for International Cooperation Youssef Boutros Ghali and Central Bank Governor Ismail Hassan.

Plea for harmony

Visiting Al-Azhar, the Archbishop of Canterbury appealed for tolerance, reports **Amira Howeidy**

Declaring that the misunderstandings of the past should be buried, the Archbishop of Canterbury *George Carey suggested* yesterday four new "attitudes" as the cornerstone of Islamic-Christian dialogue. In an address at Al-Azhar University, the Archbishop said friendship should replace hostility, understanding take the place of ignorance, reciprocity take over from exclusivism and cooperation replace confrontation.

He described friendship as the "context in which differences may be held harmoniously and where opposing beliefs can be contained in love without spilling over into antagonism and hatred."

The Archbishop said religious leaders *"have a particular responsibility to set* examples of fraternity and to find opportunities to enter into the experiences of others."

Although "ignorance is the most terrible of cultural diseases," the Archbishop believes Christians and Muslims remain ignorant of one another. "We shall only eradicate extremism which resorts to violence if *there is respect for one another* and awareness that whether we like it or not, Islam and Christianity are not going to go away.

"Religious leaders," the archbishop continued, "carry a great responsibility for ensuring that understanding replaces ignorance."

Moving to the third "attitude," reciprocity not exclusivism, Carey described as "noteworthy and impressive" the centuries-long Egyptian tradition of "hospitality and coexistence between the ancient Coptic Church with its more dominant neighbour, Islam." He said "this kind of *reciprocity is a pattern* which should provide a model for many other parts of the world though, sadly, it will always be threatened by those who wish to retreat into some kind of exclusivism."

As to cooperation replacing confrontation, Carey said differences were genuine and should not be denied. But "there is more shared understanding and greater *agreement than we sometimes think*. This is something to celebrate and rejoice in. In spite of our differences, there are wide areas of agreement which can provide a basis for greater cooperation."

The followers of both faiths, he said, are encouraged to endeavour to be good citizens and neighbours, to respect and love others. There is also agreement that justice and integrity should be at the heart of society. "We share a common allegiance to eternal truths in a world which is dominated by the present," Carey said.

Before delivering his address, Carey met *with Sheikh Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq*, Rector of Al Azhar Mosque, who affirmed Islam's respect for Judaism and Christianity as revealed religions. The sheikh affirmed the importance of cooperation among followers of the three religions in serving humanity.

Home at last

The Mahmoud Khalil museum has finally opened its doors after six years of renovation. **Rania Khallaf** visits the newly restored palace.

Millet, Garden at Barbizon, 1854

President Mubarak presided on Tuesday at the inauguration ceremony of the Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil museum in Giza, where 800 works by prominent European artists, unmatched in the Middle East, are on display. The opening capped six years of restoration work which transformed the turn of the century palace into a high-tech *museum at a cost* of LE14 million.

The three-floor museum contains 800 works by 96 artists which span the major movements in 19th century European art, from the socially committed realism of Courbet to the post-impressionism of Van Gogh and Gauguin.

The opening of the museum, which is equipped with a state of the art security system, confirms Egypt's cultural leadership in the Middle East, said Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni.

Ahmed Nawwar, head of the National *Centre for Plastic Arts, said* the museum places Cairo among the civilised capitals of the world. "Museums constitute the living memory of society," he said, stressing the importance of establishing a museum in every governorate.

Restoration work on the palace was carried out by Egyptian and French experts. "Had it not been for the restoration this palace would have been in ruins," Nawwar said. Annexed to the *museum is* a department for restoring works of art.

"With the opening of this museum we hope that French art will become familiar to the Egyptian public and to tourists," Patrick Leclerq, the French ambassador in Cairo, said. "I am really proud to see such a rare collection of French paintings exhibited in such a unique building."

The ground floor of the museum houses a collection of 3,330 books in Arabic and French, including Khalil's own library.

Khalil (1877-1953), *who served* as chairman of the Egyptian Senate between 1938 and 1940, was a celebrated collector. *In his will he* bequeathed his collection to the state, with the stipulation that the paintings be exhibited in his former home.

The palace, built at the beginning of the century by the Jewish Sawares family, was acquired by Khalil in the 1940s. After Anwar El-Sadat became president the palace, adjacent to Sadat's home, was used as office space and the collection transferred to a small villa in Zamalek. Six years ago President Hosni Mubarak ordered that the palace be restored and *the collection* returned to *its* original home.

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Elections in the air

With parliamentary elections set for 29 November, **Dina Ezzat** explores what the average Egyptian expects from the next People's Assembly, while **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports on the sprint for parliamentary seats by members of professional syndicates and trade unions

Many Egyptians — interviewed in offices, shops, schools, railway stations and on the streets — said their main hope for the next People's Assembly was that it should ease the economic burdens of everyday life. "Cheaper but better" were the words men and women from different age, economic and social groups used to describe their expectations.

Whether talking about education, health services, housing or food, people insisted that prices should fall and quality improve. Consequently, they will vote for candidates ready to battle for a better life for lower and middle income brackets — with the necessities of life more affordable and its daily problems less intractable.

"If my son is down with a cold, just a cold, nothing more serious, I need a minimum of LE20 for a week's medication," said a 49-year-old porter at the Cairo railway station. "How many extra LE20s does the government think I have?"

"Education is deteriorating in terms of quality and is also getting very expensive," said Sahar, an Applied Arts student at Cairo University. "I feel very embarrassed every time I have to ask my father for money. I know it is too much for him. The next parliament must stop any attempt on the part of the government to privatise education or even raise the tuition fees."

A 16-year-old apprentice at a workshop in downtown Cairo was unaware of the existence of parliament. "I just know there is a government that runs everything," he said. But he insisted that "whoever has the right to argue with the government must make it clear that life is very expensive and very difficult."

Others said they wanted courageous and articulate MPs who were ready to defend the people's interest — by requesting concerned officials to report to parliament on serious problems, proposing laws to combat social ills and opposing government policies which could add to the people's burden as the nation moves towards a market economy.

However many people interviewed were apathetic, and said they were not intending to vote. Despite official reports suggesting that the number of registered voters has increased as a result of campaigning by the various political parties, many people still seemed convinced that parliament could do little to address their interests.

"Let's be honest," commented a middle-aged engineer. "Ninety-nine percent of those who were in the outgoing parliament are running for re-election. But what have they done for the people in general, let alone their own constituents?

"The man I voted for last time turned his back on those who elected him once he found his feet in parliament. I am not saying that none of them cares, but I believe that most people who run for election are not doing it in the spirit of public service but out of pure self-interest. There are so many stories of corrupt MPs who abused their connections."

But others were convinced it was their duty to vote. "I must vote. If we all stop voting, things are going to get significantly worse," said Mohsen, a teacher of Arabic in his early 30s.

And for Makram Mohamed Ahmed, editor-in-chief of the weekly *Al-Mussawar* magazine, the forthcoming elections are a rare chance for the silent majority to speak out. "The elections could be an important step on the road to a parliament that better represents Egypt's political and partisan map," Ahmed wrote in an editorial last week. Exhorting all the nation's political forces to take part, Ahmed urged the silent majority to rise from their slumber and participate.

Leading members of both white and blue collar unions are planning to contest the parliamentary elections, but opinions are divided as to whether they should receive active union support. Some argue that unions should back their candidates strongly because they are running to protect union interests. But others stress that the distinction between political parties and professional syndicates and workers' unions should be maintained, and that unions should not become involved in politics.

Dr Hamdi El-Sayed, chairman of the Doctors' Syndicate, believes that professional syndicates should encourage their members to participate actively in politics. "They are in the forefront of those who should contest the elections, not only because of their high cultural and educational standards and political awareness, but also to oppose any laws that may adversely affect their union's interest," El-Sayed said. He cited Law 100 of 1993, regulating union activities, which, he said, was passed without prior consultation with the concerned unions.

"In fact, the membership of professional syndicates is larger than that of all the political parties," El-Sayed continued. "This is another reason for professionals to contest the elections." However, he emphasised that syndicates' backing for their candidates should be confined to moral and promotional support.

El-Sayed himself will run for election in Al-Nozha constituency in Heliopolis. He ran there in 1990 and failed, but the Court of Cassation later ruled that the polling at Al-Nozha had been rigged in favour of National Democratic Party (NDP) candidate, Badreddin Khattab. The People's Assembly reacted by disqualifying Khattab and instating El-Sayed.

Candidates from the Press Syndicate say that winning parliamentary seats means a chance to exert greater opposition to laws affecting the interests of journalists. With the passing of the controversial Law 93 of 1995, which stiffened penalties for publication offences, these candidates want to raise issues of press freedom, together with the war against terrorism and corruption, in the next parliament. Providing support to these candidates "is an established tradition in the history of Egyptian syndicates," argued Galal Eissa, the Press Syndicate's deputy chairman. "To me, syndicates should provide every kind of support to their members seeking election because any success achieved by those members is a success for the syndicate as a whole."

Eissa said that he had personally tried to urge as many journalists as possible to run for election to defend the interests of the Press Syndicate in the next parliament. "This is only natural, does not constitute a violation of the Constitution and is not discriminatory because unions should keep an eye on all the laws that affect them."

Journalists seeking election include Mohamed Zayed, managing editor of *Al-Ahram* (Santa, Gharbiya), *Al-Akhbar*'s Mohamed Abddel-Qoddous (Boulaq, Cairo), Mustafa Bakri, editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahrar*, the Liberal Party's mouthpiece, (in Helwan, running against Mohamed Ali Mahgoub, the minister of *wakfs* or religous endowments), Osama Sharshar, the parliamentary reporter of *Al-Ahrar* (in Menouf against Industry Minister Ibrahim Fawzi), Moataz Salaheddin, editor-in-chief of *Al-Nil*, the mouthpiece of the Unionst Democratic Party (in Menouf) and Abdel-Aziz El-Nahhas, a reporter with the Wafd Party newspaper (in Sammanoud, Gharbiya).

There are, however, some union activists who object to syndicate support for parliamentary candidates. Galal Saad, assistant secretary-general of the Bar Association, said that even if candidates made it to parliament with the backing of their syndicates, they would still not be able to form a pressure group to lobby in the Assembly. "As we all expect, the NDP will have a sweeping majority in the next parliament," Saad said. "This will neutralise any kind of pressure which unionist MPs may able to exert in parliament."

Sameh Ashour, a lawyer, believes syndicates should not get involved in the elections because "this is a purely political activity that should be confined to parties". If syndicates became involved, he argued, there was a danger that those controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood might provide financial and promotional support to Brotherhood candidates. According to Abdel-Aziz Mohamed, chairman of the Bar Association's Cairo branch, more than 600 lawyers are running for parliament.

By the same token, many trade union leaders, some of whom were members of the outgoing parliament, are running for election. They include El-Sayed Rashed, chairman of the Labour Federation and deputy speaker of the outgoing Assembly, who will run in Sidi Gaber in Alexandria; Mustafa Mongi, deputy chairman of the Labour Federation and deputy chairman of parliament's manpower committee (Helwan); Ahmed Harak, secretary-general of the Labour Federation (Belqas in Dakahliya); Abdel-Moneim El-Azali, second secretary of the Labour Federation, (Abu Zaabal in Qalyubiya); Fawzi Abdel-Bari, chairman of the Petroleum Workers' Union, (Zawiya Al-Hamra in Cairo); and Abdel-Latif Eissa, chairman of the Union of Food Industry Workers, who will run in Hadayek Al-Qubba in Cairo.

Reviving Sadat's 'village ethics'

To keep alive his memory and ideas, a group of 73 men and women are planning to establish an Anwar El-Sadat party — on the 14th anniversary of the late president's assassination. *Al-Ahram Weekly* listens to the would-be founders

Banning video-clip songs, encouraging cooperative housing and reviving "village ethics" can hardly serve as a platform for a political party struggling to come into existence on the threshold of the 21st century. But these are the "ideological" foundations of an embryonic party dedicated to commemorating the name of Anwar El-Sadat.

Tomorrow — the 14th anniversary of Sadat's assassination and the 23rd anniversary of the October War, which he launched — the would-be founders will declare the party's birth, although they are yet to acquire a legal licence.

"The idea of establishing a party to honour Sadat's achievements of war, peace and prosperity and to promote his visionary ideas and policies has been on my mind since the day Sadat was shot by militants on 6 October 1981," said Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab, an accountant and spokesman for the founders.

According to Abdel-Wahhab, thousands of people had flocked to join the party, "but we wanted the symbolic figure of 73" — an allusion to the October 1973 War. They include men and women from different social backgrounds "but they are mostly young people," said Salah Ramadan, a founder in his late 50s.

Action has already been initiated to give the group official recognition. The spokesman said that its programme of action was submitted earlier this week to the Political Parties Committee, a quasi-governmental body attached to the *Shura* Council which is empowered to grant, or deny, a licence. The committee's response should come within a month.

"Our principles and programme are simply a summary of the ideas of patriotism and village ethics that President Sadat always propagated," Ramadan explained.

The party does not have a specific ideology. "We think that whatever the people like should be implemented," Abdel-Wahhab said. Its dreams of reform will be based on the "village ethics" which Sadat was so fond of promoting.

To raise the education level and combat the private lessons phenomenon, the party will encourage people to donate money to school teachers. To solve the housing problem, people will be urged to come together in groups and build their own houses. To bring down the unemployment rate, the party will "ban video-clip songs performed by effeminate singers which distract young people's attention from the sublime ideal of work." These young men and women will be encouraged to take part in cooperative agricultural-industrial projects.

To deal with security problems and the overload on the courts, the party will revive common law tribunals — councils of prominent personalities from a certain village or district commissioned to arbitrate disputes. "It is all inspired by village ethics, exactly as President Sadat would have wanted it to be," Abdel-Wahhab said.

And to cure the chronic economic malaise, the party will encourage people to cut consumption and increase production. "If we are allowed to promote this agenda," Abdel-Wahhab argued, "Egypt will become one of the richest and most developed nations of the world."

While arguing that Sadat's assassination by Islamist militants was "an act of God" and "had no political significance whatsoever", the founders concede that Sadat made some mistakes, such as imposing restrictions on the freedom of the press and the activities of political parties. But Abdel-Wahhab assured that "our programme is opposed to this".

Columnist Mustafa Amin, commenting on the idea of a Sadat party, wrote that "it is only fair to have a party defending Sadat, the man who was duly and unduly criticised". **DE**

Classroom jam compounded

Many of the nation's already overcrowded universities had to accept double the usual number of first year students this academic year. **Nermeen El-Nawawi** investigates the "double-class" problem



photo: Nour Sobeih

University lecture halls, classrooms, corridors and laboratories are filled to overflowing this academic year, as crowds of students, particularly first years, cram themselves inside. Some students are even forced to sit on the floor or rent a chair from an attendant or a porter to attend lectures.

The overcrowding stems from the fact that universities have had to accept double the usual number of first year students this academic year. What has become known as the "double-class" problem dates back to a government decision in 1989 to combine the fifth and sixth primary school grades. So there were double the usual number of pupils completing their primary education that year. The same students finished secondary school this year, and must now be accommodated in the universities.

Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin told **Nevine Khalil** that the Supreme Council for Universities, under his chairmanship, had decided that the universities would be able to cope with the increase in students. "The university presidents said that their faculties are prepared and equipped to admit a larger student body," Bahaeddin said. And while some university officials conceded that they faced major problems, others maintained they had sufficient resources to cope with the crisis.

Hassan Imam, vice-president for student affairs at Cairo University, said that the university, with an enrollment of 130,000, had accepted 24,000 secondary school graduates this year — double the usual number, and that overcrowded conditions, a fact of life in faculties like law and commerce, have now extended to applied science faculties such as engineering. Moreover, he added, the student hostel had to accommodate about 35 per cent of the new students. To cope with the problem, additional buildings had to be constructed at several colleges, and extensions are underway at the hostel itself.

"The double class is posing problems of space, funds and facilities for our faculty, especially as our new building is still under construction," confirmed Ahmed Abdel-Bari, dean of the university's Faculty of Pharmacology. According to Abdel-Bari, the faculty's laboratories and lecture rooms cannot accommodate more than 600 students, but double that number have been accepted.

There were enough professors and lecturers, he said, but students have had to be divided into two groups, with different lecture and laboratory hours, running from 8am to 9pm six days a week. "This is making things very hectic for our staff and administration because it requires their continuous attendance and supervision."

Dr Ayman Ghallab, head of the histology department of Zagazig University's Faculty of Medicine, described the situation as "like someone who expected a baby but got twins". He said his faculty received 500 students this year, instead of 250, and had divided them into nine sections, with about 60 students in each, instead of six sections with 40 students each. And yet, no additional funds or equipment have been forthcoming. "In the histology department, which mainly depends on the use of microscopes. We did not receive any additional microscopes to cope with the large number of students," he said.

According to Nabil Saleh, dean of Ain Shams University's Faculty of Engineering, the faculty has accepted 1,300 secondary school graduates, 370 transfer students and 400 failures from the previous year. "Because the lecture halls cannot accommodate this number," he explained, "we divided the students into sections and provided the staff with wireless microphones".

However Dr Magid Amin, dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Dental Medicine, insisted that his faculty did not face problems because the 240 students accepted this year "are less than the numbers we used to accept in the 1970s and '80s". And Dr Mo'taz El-Sherbini, dean of Cairo University's Faculty of Medicine, said his faculty had experienced no difficulties as a result of the double class. The faculty was accustomed to large numbers, he said, and has enough facilities, space and staff to cope with them.

But first year student Miral Mursi said she had stopped attending the anatomy class because she could not get close enough to the professor to watch the dissection. "There are too many of us and the professors can't cope," she commented.

However, Bahaeddin said that even more students had been admitted to the Faculty of Medicine during the '80s. The congestion could be relieved, he suggested, if students were divided into smaller groups and professors made themselves more available to the students. "In medicine, we have enough professors to teach three times this number," he said, "but it needs some organisation".

Al-Azhar University and the American University in Cairo (AUC) have not been affected by the double class. The fifth and sixth primary education grades were not merged at Al-Azhar schools and thus the problem did not arise. And at AUC, Abdel-Khalek Allam, vice-president for student affairs, said that while "national universities may be under political and public opinion pressures, we are here to provide quality education which cannot be achieved with large numbers of students enrolled in classes." With an enrollment of 4,400 students, the AUC accepted less than 700 students this year "which is less than the 750 we accepted last year".

As a solution to the problem of the double class, Amin suggested that additional funds could be raised by admitting more foreign students who pay higher tuition fees. Alternatively, Abdel-Bari suggested greater dependence on private education institutes to remove some of the load from the universities.

'Fair' trial for Abdel-Rahman

Experts on militant Islam believe a US grand jury acted impartially in passing a guilty verdict against Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman but, as expected, his lawyer disagreed. **Shaden Shehab** reports

Experts on the Islamist militant movement believe that Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, spiritual leader of the anti-government Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, received a fair trial in New York and that the guilty verdict passed against him by the jury was "just".

The sheikh and nine followers were found guilty of plotting the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing that killed six people and injured more than 1,000. They were also convicted of planning to blow up the United Nations and vital highway tunnels in New York. They face life imprisonment when they are sentenced in January.

"Nobody can deny that Omar Abdel-Rahman is the maestro of the terrorist groups in this country. To claim that he was unjustly accused is absurd," said Rifaat El-Said, secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party and a researcher in political Islam.

"Terrorism starts with a *fatwa* (religious ruling) from the *emir* or leader of an Islamist group. When he [Abdel-Rahman] issues a *fatwa* that somebody is an infidel, then the group is expected to kill this person." Consequently, El-Said argued, Abdel-Rahman should be held responsible for many of the terrorist crimes that have been committed.

The United States, he said, "should learn the lesson that they should not allow snakes into their own house. The price they paid was high indeed — people killed and wounded in the World Trade Center explosion." The price would be even higher, he added, if Al-Gama'a decided to retaliate for Abdel-Rahman's conviction, and he urged other countries, such as Denmark, Switzerland and Britain, which also provide refuge for terrorists, to learn from the United States' experience.

Hala Mustafa, another expert on political Islam, rejected the argument that Abdel-Rahman was put on trial for his beliefs. He was found guilty "because he issued *fatwas* that resulted in crimes, and so his conviction is legally just," she said, stressing that this was not the first time he has been convicted on similar grounds, and that "Egyptian courts have also found him guilty of encouraging murder and inciting militant groups."

Asked about the possible reaction of Islamist groups, Mustafa replied that "an act of vengeance is possible. These groups have logistic facilities all over the world enabling them to carry out terrorist activities."

But Abdel-Halim Mandour, a defence lawyer for Islamists, including Abdel-Rahman, said the sheikh was found guilty because of his beliefs. "This is unfair. The jury was probably racist and was pressured to pass this verdict. The news came as a shock to all true Muslims."

Mandour agreed there was likely to be some reaction from Islamist groups. "But nobody can predict the lengths they will go to."

The US Embassy in Cairo warned US citizens in August to be on their guard after it received threats, linked to Abdel-Rahman's trial, against American interests. A spokesman said on Monday that the embassy stood by its August advice and was evaluating the situation to see if it needed to issue new directives.

Abdel-Raman, a blind cleric, left Egypt for Sudan and then went to the United States in 1990. In 1994 an Egyptian court sentenced him in absentia to seven years hard labour for inciting a riot and attempting to kill two policemen in Fayoum in 1989. He was also tried on charges of sanctioning the assassination of President Anwar El-Sadat on 6 October, 1981 and inciting an attempt to overthrow the government two days after the slaying. He was acquitted in those two cases.

Sanctioning the imbalance of power

Political analysts, speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, said that the Oslo II agreement reflected the imbalance of power in the Middle East and provided another indication of the collapse of Arab solidarity

The PLO-Israel agreement on expanding autonomy in the West Bank, popularly known as Oslo II, was made possible by concessions which Yasser Arafat made to Israel. Thus the agreement, which was signed by Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at a White House ceremony last Thursday, was a reflection of the regional balance of power, which is tipped in Israel's favour. This was the argument put forward by several political analysts interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Analysing the current status of the peace process, these analysts have concluded that both the Arab states and the Palestinians were intent on advancing their own individual interests. This, they believe, has dealt another blow to Arab solidarity, already weakened by the consequences of the Gulf War.

"Oslo II was possible because the Palestinians made concessions to Israel," said Mustafa El-Sayed, a professor of political science at the American University in Cairo (AUC). He explained that Arafat had been apprehensive that the separate deal between Jordan and Israel might be followed by another deal between Syria and the Jewish state. "He was eager to reach any agreement with Israel and the only agreement that could be reached was one that involved concessions," El-Sayed said.

The Palestinians "accepted the continued presence of Jewish settlements, postponed the issue of Jerusalem to the final stage of negotiations and agreed to the Israeli definition of military redeployment. The sad truth is that the West Bank remains under Israeli occupation."

El-Sayed believes that Oslo I and II should be seen in the context of the regional and international changes that took place since 1990. "The Palestinian cause was weakened by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, which used to provide support to the PLO," he said. "In addition, Arab divisions have widened as a result of the Gulf War, which deprived the PLO of the support of the Gulf states." He noted that the Gulf states of Oman and Qatar have opened their doors to trade cooperation with Israel.

Mahgoub Omar, a Palestinian affairs expert, was non-committal on the question of the agreement, but he acknowledged the problem of the regional balance of power. In his view, Oslo II is a natural sequel to Oslo I. "The whole process is like a train which has to move to reach the next station. What is important is the speed at which this train moves." He pointed out that the agreement on expanding autonomy was reached 14 months behind schedule.

"The success of Oslo II will depend on taking fast action for its implementation, but there is still the problem of the balance of power." Palestinians, Omar continued, needed Arab as well as international support in order to pressure Israel to fulfill its promises "but, at any rate, Oslo II is not the train's last stop".

Abdel-Wahab El-Messeiri, a professor of literature and the author of a number of books on Zionist ideology, said the Arab world has been fragmented since the 1978 Camp David agreements were concluded by Egypt and Israel. "Each Arab country is striving to serve its own strategic interests and priorities," he said. "The Palestinians went their own way to sign agreements with Israel, so did Jordan, and other Arab countries will probably follow. Oman and Qatar opened their doors to Israel. Arab solidarity became history."

In El-Messeiri's opinion, "We have to understand the fact that Israel is negotiating with people under occupation; therefore, it has the upper hand. Oslo II is acceptable if we accept the Arab status quo as final and if we accept that we were disgracefully defeated."

Nabil Abdel-Fattah of the Al-Ahram Centre for Strategic Studies agreed with El-Messeiri's assessment but added that, "the problem with Oslo II is that the wording of the document is vague, which is the game usually played by Israel."

The agreement, he said, reflected the imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians — "the discrepancy in strategic power". Abdel-Fattah anticipated fierce opposition from militant groups such as Jihad and Hamas which could lead to their further suppression.

He also agreed that the accord marked the demise of Arab solidarity, with each Arab country negotiating separately with Israel to advance its own interests. **SS**

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



An air of development

Zeinab Abul Gheit looks at the latest effort at combating environmental pollution in Egypt

Amid growing concerns over the issue of environmental pollution in Egypt, a five-year project spearheaded by Cairo University and the US's Washington University and Aragonne National Laboratory was inaugurated at Cairo University late last month. The LE10 million project, which is funded by the US Department of Agriculture, includes the establishment of the Centre for Environmental Hazard Mitigation (CEHM). The new centre is made up of three well equipped environmental research laboratories, and will be staffed by several US-trained Egyptian scientists.

According to Mohamed Sultan, the US principal investigator for the centre, the aim of the centre is to devise ways by which to eliminate air, soil and water pollution in Egypt so as to protect the health of the citizens, thereby increasing productivity and promoting development.

Sultan added that the first of the three labs will be responsible only for carrying out general computational operations necessary for modern environmental studies. The second is a geochemistry lab equipped with instruments to measure the levels of various pollutants. The third lab, which concentrates on geophysics, holds instruments enabling scientists to study topography and locate objects buried several hundred metres in the ground. The geochemistry and geophysics labs are scheduled to be completed within 9 to 15 months.

The project also includes provisions for the launching of other environmental initiatives in Egypt. At the moment, said Sultan, American and Egyptian scientists are studying urbanisation in the Nile Delta region as well as the erosion of the Delta along the coast of the Mediterranean.

"Once the remaining labs are operational, other projects will be initiated to assess environmental hazards related to air, soil and water pollution," he noted.

To ensure that the project reaches maximum utility, Egyptian scientists are currently being trained by their American counterparts on how to operate and maintain the labs. While some Egyptian scientists were trained at Washington University on how to use the equipment in the first lab, a team of US scientists is scheduled to visit Cairo to complete the training programme.

With the project logistics already established, Mohamed Sharqawi, the dean of Cairo University's faculty of science and the director of the CEHM, affirmed that the project has already begun to tackle some core issues. "Last January, we began examining the availability of underground water east of El-Minya, in Wadi Tarfa, in order to determine the area's potential agricultural productivity," said Sharqawi.

In addition, he noted, another project aimed at researching the use of natural versus industrial pesticides, has been launched as part and parcel of the CEHM programme.

Yehia Abdel-Hadi, the head of the geophysics department at the Faculty of Science, Cairo University said that the CEHM has implemented two important development projects. Centre experts studying Wadi Tarfa, which lies between the Damietta branch of the Nile and the Gulf of Suez, found 20,000 feddans of arable land. Using satellites, they specified locations for building dams to avoid the effects of floods in the future. Abdel-Hadi said centre studies indicated that Wadi Tarfa promises to be an attractive agricultural and industrial area which could accommodate up to three million inhabitants.

According to Abdel-Hadi, the CEHM is also involved in a project to develop Lake Qaroun and the surrounding area, by enhancing its resources, protecting the underground water and the agricultural land against pollution and high salinity.

To ensure that the findings of the centre are put to good use, its studies will be made available to businesses, individuals and governmental bodies.

Energise for life

A TWO DAY conference entitled: "How to Finance Energy Projects in the Mediterranean Region", was held in Cairo early last week. With over 200 private and public sector energy and banking specialists in attendance, the participants reviewed the financial needs of energy projects in the Mediterranean region, and discussed present and prospective sources of financing. Among the other topics addressed in the conference were the means by which to create appropriate business and legal investment conditions for energy projects required in *Third Mediterranean Countries (TMC)*.

The conference, which was organised by the European Commission's Programme of International Energy Cooperation, also sought to create a bond between the European Union and TMCs, major energy companies, institutions and public enterprises, with the networking of energy production and distribution among countries in the area.

The conference is a follow-up to the Tunis Conference on Euro-Mediterranean Energy Cooperation which was held on 27 and 28 March, and the Athens Workshop on Euro-Mediterranean Energy Partnership, which was organised by the commission on 6-7 July, 1995. These two conferences highlighted the importance of establishing a long-term dialogue between the political, economic and financial institutions involved in the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation process in order to develop consistent energy policies.

Fair's fare

THE GENERAL Authority for Fairs and International Exhibitions will hold the 4th Expo Exports on 21-31 October in the Nasr City fairgrounds.

The exhibition, which is designed to promote the export of Egyptian goods, will have on display products such as furniture, pharmaceuticals, textiles, ready-made garments, food products, carpets, leather, and construction and engineering materials and equipment. Over 300 companies are expected to participate.

According to Hanaa Shaker, the head of the Cairo Fairgrounds, this exhibition is held every three years. "When it was last held in 1992, $7 million worth of export deals were concluded along with about LE30 million in local deals," she said, adding her hopes that this year's exhibition will be more successful.

Shaker noted that all the Egyptian Commercial Representation offices abroad have been briefed on the event as a means of informing foreign businessmen interested in importing Egyptian goods.

Oiling the contract system

Exploration and drilling contracts signed between the government and multinational oil companies are an important factor in enhancing oil production. **Ihab El-Dessouki** analyses the contracting system and offers some suggestions

Accounting for approximately 48 per cent of Egypt's total exports, the oil industry is a dominant force in the Egyptian economy. Each year, oil exports bring in about $1.5 billion, also making it one of the most important foreign currency generators. However, while these figure indicate an unhealthy dependence on oil as a source of export revenue, they do reinforce the need to protect the oil sector.

Contracts signed between the Egyptian government and multinational oil companies are instrumental in determining the volume of oil production. However, the terms of these contracts differ greatly from one country to another, and depend, to a great degree, on the priority afforded to the industry by a given state. Contractual terms are also determined by the geological composition of the area and the risk factor involved in the exploration and extraction process. Additionally, the terms stipulated in the oil exploration contracts tend to change from time to time depending on developments in the oil sector.

In order to attract foreign oil companies to their shores, oil exporting countries, since the 1970s, have raised the competitive stakes and *have begun to offer multinational oil giants* a variety of concessions.

While some countries offer foreign firms the opportunity for greater inter and intra-state mobility, others have decided to lower their share of the profits and have allowed multinationals to deduct operating costs from the revenue accrued.

Despite stiff competition from other countries, Egypt has managed to sign approximately 170 oil exploration contracts with foreign firms, 75 of which are still valid. Currently, almost 50 foreign companies are operating in several concession areas, while a few Egyptian companies undertake similar operations in lower-risk areas.

The contracts concluded between Egypt and the foreign companies stipulate that 20 per cent of the recovered oil is to be set aside in order to recover exploration and pre-operation costs. From the remaining 80 per cent, the host state receives 85 per cent, with the remaining 15 per cent going to the company. The costs are reviewed by the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation.

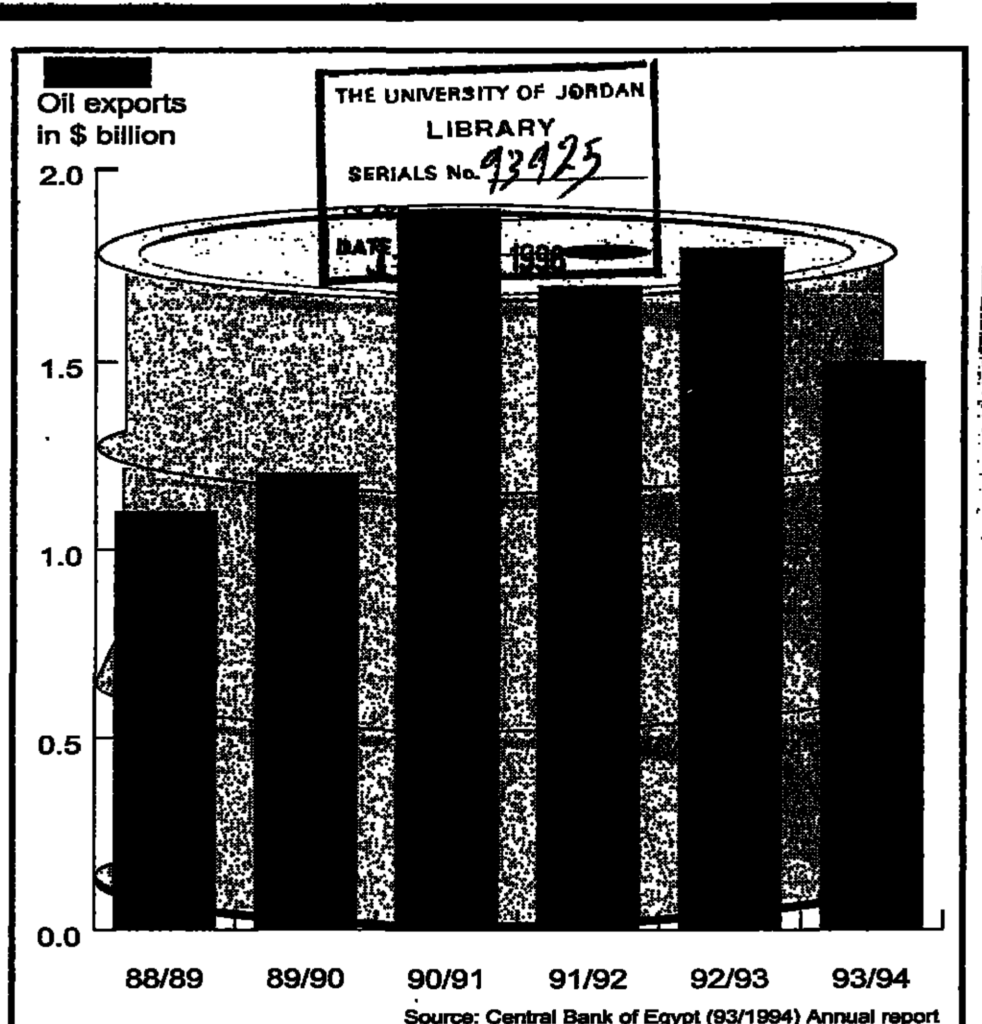
Foreign companies are also responsible for the cost of exploration, as well as shouldering the losses if oil is not discovered. In 1991, the investment by foreign oil companies in Egypt totaled $11.8 billion. Moreover, concession royalties paid by the company to the government are non-refundable. In addition, multinationals offer host countries advanced technology and solid expertise.

However, while these foreign companies continue to play a vital role in the country, domestic companies have exerted minimal efforts to acquire the necessary expertise in order to become more self-reliant in this industry.

In light of this assertion, the Egyptian government should take action on two parallel fronts. First, the terms stipulated in the contracts *should be more flexible. For example,* the output quota assigned to exploration countries should not be fixed. It should vary depending on the risk involved, the geological nature of the area to be explored and the potential for the discovery of oil.

Second, the government should also provide concessions for Egyptian companies so as to afford them a larger role in the future.

To help realise this objective, domestic companies should work alongside with multinationals in order to acquire the necessary experience. Additionally, the government should encourage banks to extend the necessary financing to domestic companies to aid them in their efforts to explore for oil in Egypt.



Cash shortage shackles UNCC

Ahead of the meeting of the Governing Council of the United Nations Compensations Commission scheduled for 9 October, **Walid Abdel-Nasser** writes that the lack of funds continues to hold up payment of compensations to victims of the Gulf War

Inquiries into the fate of compensations for direct losses suffered by individuals, corporations, governments and international organisations during the second Gulf War have recently increased.

Over the past four years, theUnited Nations Compensation Committee (UNCC— with its three organs: the governing council, the secretariat and panels of commissioners, has issued decisions approving claims for compensations amounting to over $2 billion. However, the financial resources necessary to pay these compensations are still unavailable.

Claims submitted to the UNCC are divided into six categories: category A includes claims for compensations on losses resulting from departure from Iraq or Kuwait during the period 2 August 1990 to 2 March 1991; Category B includes claims for death and serious personal injury; category C includes individuals' claims for loss of property or income amounting to less than $100,000; category D covers losses over $100,0000; category E relates to losses of corporations and companies; and category F covers claims of governments and international organisations as well as environmental damages.

Concern over the fate of the compensations has been most loudly voiced in Egypt, which was one of the countries most severely hit by the war ensuing from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Egypt has submitted around 300,000 category A claims, 600 category B claims and 90,000 category C claims.

On this last category two issues should be clarified. First, in light of the large number of *Egyptian claims under category* C, second only to the Kuwaiti claims, and to save effort and time for both the Egyptian government and the UNCC, the commission allowed both Egypt and Kuwait to submit these claims on computer diskettes.

The arrangement made with the Egyptian and Kuwaiti governments also gave the two countries more time than others to submit claims in this category, although the extended deadline has already expired.

Secondly, in light of the large volume of compensation claims for remittances of Egyptians working in Iraq, the Egyptian government and the UNCC signed a memorandum of understanding on 17 June 1993 to address these claims as a single consolidated claim submitted by the Central Bank of Egypt on behalf of individual claimants.

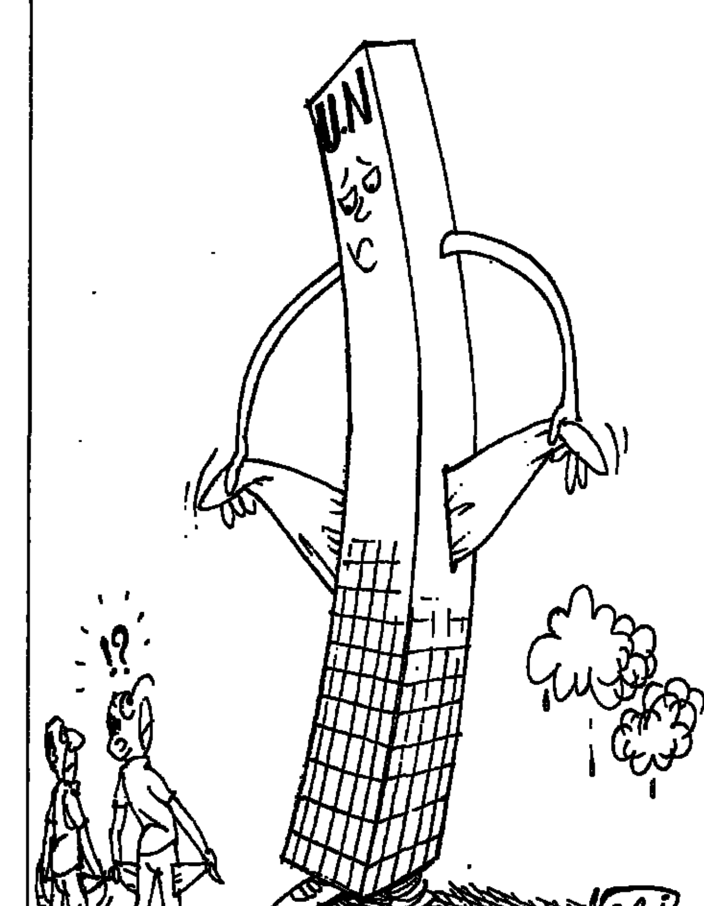
The memorandum of understanding also indicated that the UNCC should first decide whether this consolidated claim — amounting to about $490 million — lies within its jurisdiction. If a positive decision is taken, the UNCC would then evaluate each individual claim separately and issue a corresponding recommendation.

With regard to the three other categories of claims, Egypt has submitted more than 80 claims under category D, 600 under category E and a few claims under category F.

The governing council of the UNCC has already approved about 300 Egyptian category B claims and by December 1995, it is expected to have approved more than 290,000 category A claims equaling a value of $785 million.

In next week's meeting, the UNCC governing council is expected to make a decision on whether the Egyptian compensation claims related to remittances lie within the jurisdiction of the commission. The council will decide on whether the UNCC will accept claims submitted after the announced deadline and will consider the fourth instalment of individual claims under category A, which include more than 75,000 Egyptian claims valuing over $207 million.

However, the UNCC's efforts are marred by the absence of financial resources to pay the compensations already approved by the governing council.



Security Council resolutions 687, 692 and 705 of 1991 indicate that these compensations be paid by deducting 30 per cent of revenues of Iraqi oil sales after the embargo imposed on Iraq is lifted.

However, with embargo still in place, the Security Council issued resolutions 706 and 712 allowing Iraq to export part of its oil to meet the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people and to finance UN operations related to Iraq, including UNCC. This offer was repeated, with lighter conditions, in Security Council Resolution 986 of 1995. However, the government of Iraq has so far failed to implement such resolutions on grounds of sovereignty."

In 1992, Security Council Resolution 778 urged countries that are in possession of Iraqi frozen funds, Iraqi oil and oil products, and those owing Iraq payments for delivered oil to release them to the UN. The resolution also urged all UN member states to pay voluntary contributions to UN operations in Iraq, of which 30 per cent would go to the UNCC.

The funds resulting from the implementation of Resolution 778 are the only financial resources which enable the UNCC to operate and make limited payments for category B claims.

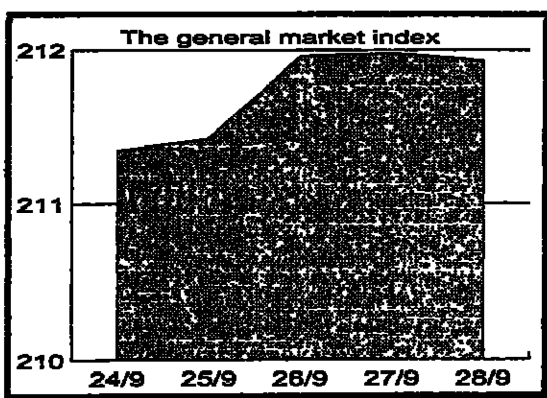
However, these resources are minuscule compared to the compensations approved by the commission so far, not to mention those still under consideration.

Securing sufficient financial resources is necessary to meet the UNCC's obligation towards millions of claimants, and to maintain the credibility of the compensation operation, as well as the credibility of the UN itself.

Dr. Abdel-Nasser is the special assistant to the executive secretary and the press officer of the United Nations Compensation Commission in Geneva.

Market report

Rebound continues



FOR THE SECOND week in a row, the stock market showed signs of recovery. The General Market Index increased by 0.23 points to reach 211.93 during the week ending 28 September. A total of 1.158 million shares, worth LE5.7 million, changed hands in 2130 transactions.

The index for the manufacturing sector gained 0.4 points to close at 244.3 points. The increase was a result of a surge in share value of many of the sector's companies. Shares of the Egyptian Esponge Co (Misr Foam) gained LE4 per share to close at LE71. Ameriya Cement Company's shares gained LE2 per share to close at LE5.15, while those of the Paint and Chemical Industries Company increased by LE2.99 to level off at LE652.

The week's big winner was the Suez Cement Company, which dominated the market in terms of the value and volume of transactions. It traded LE20.5 million in shares, or 43 per cent of the total market transactions. The company's shares gained LE1.4 to end at LE43.

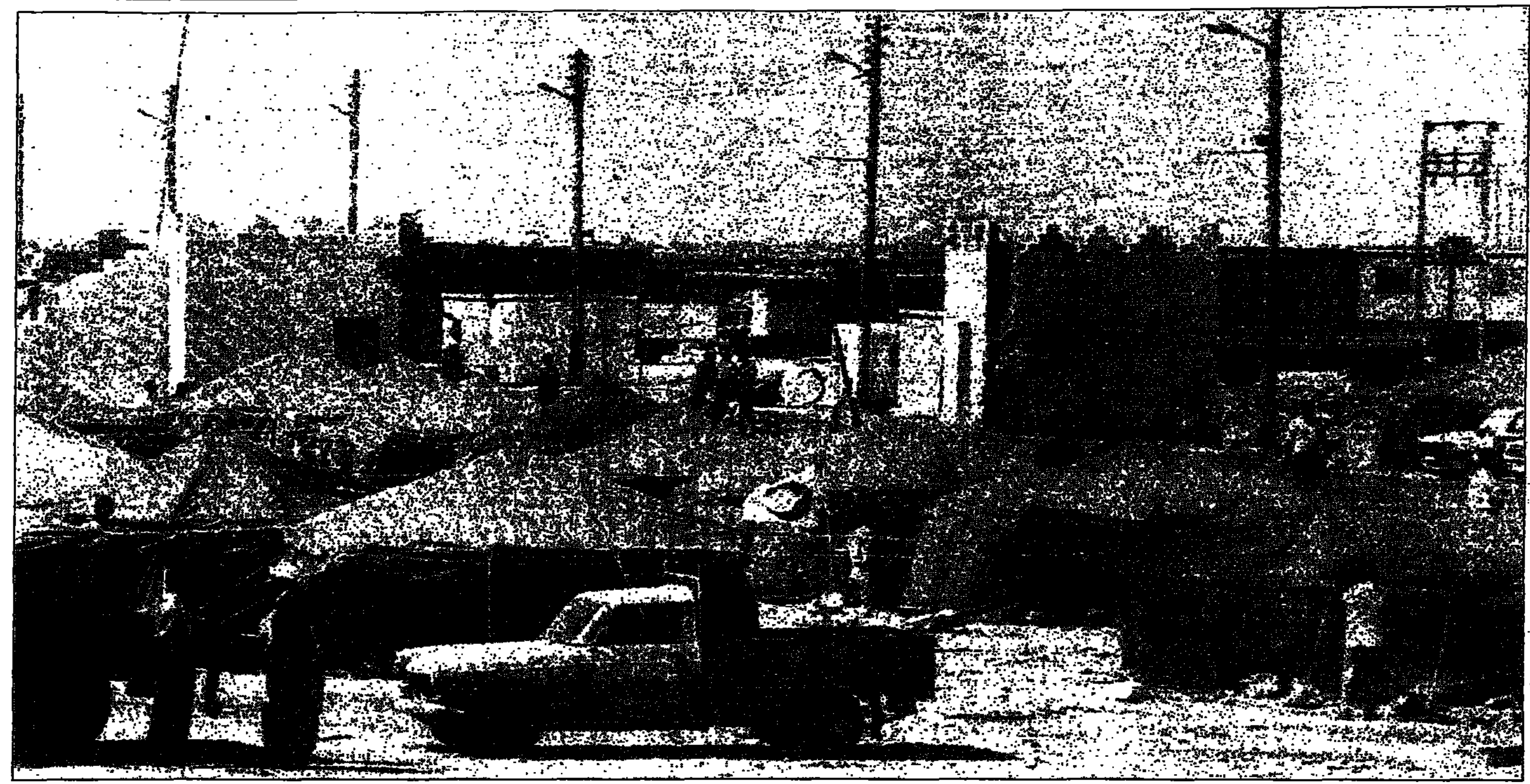
Other companies, however, did not fare so well. In only three transactions, the shares of the Egypt Gulf Petroleum Industries Co lost 12.83 per cent of their value, to close at LE64.5. Shares of El-Nasr Clothing and Textiles Co (Kabo) declined in value by LE8 to close at LE170 by the end of the week.

In the financial sector, shares of El-Watany Bank declined in value by LE4 to close at LE32, while those of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) gained LE1.5 per share to close at LE526.5. The sector's index lost 0.37 points.

Idle hands may be the devil's playground, but in the service sector, it was representative of a noticeable absence of trading in the shares of the sector's companies. The share value of only two companies changed from last week's figures. The shares of the Gezira Hotel and Tourism Co lost LE5 per share to level off at week's end to LE102 per share. Misr Hotel's shares also declined in value, losing LE2.49 to close at LE67.5 per share.

In all, the shares of 29 companies increased in value, 19 declined and 29 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Refugees again — Palestinians, no longer welcome in Libya and with little hope of returning to their former homes in Palestine, set up their makeshift camp on the Libyan-Egyptian border *photo:Khaled El-Fiqi*

On the outskirts of Oslo

The derailing of the Taba agreement seems to have already begun, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

Having spent 16 months negotiating the Taba agreement, Israeli and Palestinian leaders are now facing up to the even more traumatic task of its implementation. "This is the gravest flaw of the whole Oslo formula," says Israeli historian and executive member of the Israeli Hadash Party, Ilan Pappe. "Because it is based on slow, probationary progress, it is extremely easy to sabotage. For groups opposed to the peace process, whether Israeli or Palestinian, Oslo is a train waiting to be derailed."

Just how easy has become evident in the week since the glitzy White House signing ceremony. Take, for instance, the issue of the 5,000 or so Palestinian political prisoners still interned in Israeli jails.

In the agreement, Israel has pledged to release prisoners in three stages: after the signing, on the eve of elections to the new Palestinian Council and, vaguely, "according to principles to be established separately". But as soon as this was made public, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, came under fire from the Likud opposition and pressure groups demanding an assurance that no prisoner with "Jewish blood on their hands" would be freed. So Rabin postponed the release of the first batch of 1,300 prisoners until after the Knesset debated the Taba agreement on 5 October.

Palestinian National Authority (PNA) negotiators at Taba also insisted that they received a guarantee from the Israelis that "all" of the 28 Palestinian female prisoners would be released "this week". But on 1 October Israeli President Ezer Weizman strongly implied that he would not pardon "two or three cases" where women have been convicted of killing Israelis.

The question of Palestinian prisoners has been a running sore throughout the Oslo process.

And the danger of its ongoing irresolution in Oslo's second stage was spelled out by PLO advisor, Ahmed Tibi. Not releasing prisoners, he says, "would constitute a severe violation of the agreement." It would also harm the stature of the PNA among Palestinians.

But it is the Israeli government's fear of destabilising actions by groups representing the ideological core of the West Bank's 130,000 Jewish settlers that could really stall Taba's implementation. This has already been shown in the wholly unclear nature of the Israeli army's redeployment in the West Bank.

According to a report published on 27 September in the *Jerusalem Post* — and based, it was claimed, on an appendix of the agreement — Israeli will commence its redeployment in Jenin in January and conclude it in Hebron in March. But, on 1 October, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, said the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) this week would start "dismantling positions" in at least 12 West Bank villages. And, on 2 October, Israel's chief military negotiator, Uzi Dayan, announced that the army could be out of "most" West Bank cities and villages by December. This, he said, would give the PNA the "option" of holding elections either before or after Ramadan in February.

These uncertainties reflect what is the most glaring omission in the whole Taba package. Nowhere in the agreement's 400 pages is there any fixed timetable for Israel's redeployment in the West Bank. There is only a commitment that Palestinian elections will be held 22 days after "the first phase" of redeployment is completed. Sources say the Israelis wanted such ambiguity so as to pace the redeployment as circumstances allow. But ambiguity also suggests indecision, and the settlers are acting on it.

On 1 and 2 October, several hundred settlers from settlements in the Jordan Valley blocked the Allenby Bridge in protest at Rabin's decision to expand the "autonomous area" of Jericho by seven kilometres. Even more ominously — and over the same weekend — dozens of activists from the racist Kach and Gush Emunim movements converged on Hebron to show solidarity with the city's 415 settlers, sparking clashes with local Palestinians, trashing Palestinian property and generally causing havoc.

The import behind these actions was spelled out by a Kach member in Hebron. "This is our way of greeting the Palestinian police," he said. "They have to know that if they touch the hair on a Jewish child, we will respond." There are due to be 400 Palestinian police stationed in Hebron. If the settlers wish to slow the pace of redeployment — and perhaps sabotage it entirely — they know that all they need do, in the words of the Kach member, is "keep tensions high in Hebron".

Rabin and Arafat realised the Taba agreement by compromising over redeployment in Hebron. The PLO leader, say sources, was eventually convinced that Rabin would not remove the city's settlers because the Israeli leader did not want a confrontation with the Israeli right, at least not this side of the Israeli elections. This may have been statesmanship on Arafat's part, since he is sure that the self-rule can only "broaden" in the West Bank if Rabin (and not Netanyahu) is the next prime minister of Israel. But the longer Israel delays on redeployment and Palestinian elections, the more Arafat and Rabin may discover that in clinching the "compromise" in Taba they may well have lost the peace in the West Bank.

Around 400 Palestinians are stranded at the borders between Egypt and Libya, waiting for a chance to return home. But will there be a welcome for them? **Khaled Dawood** reports from Salloum

Following a speech by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on 1 September in which he announced that he will expel all 30,000 Palestinians living in Libya, thousands have already left.

Palestinian families interviewed at the Egyptian crossing point of Salloum said that even before the 1 September speech, members of the Libyan Revolutionary Committees called at their homes and told them that they would have to sell their houses and belongings and leave the country.

Umm Adel, mother of four children, said that by the end of August, all Palestinian teachers, doctors, engineers and workers were told that they were no longer needed in their jobs. They were given their last salary for that month.

"We were not expelled from Libya. But, after they fired our men from their jobs, how are we going to stay there? They expelled us indirectly," she said at the Egyptian crossing point.

Yet, *Umm* Adel and the other Palestinians who left Libya are considered to be the lucky ones as they have somewhere else to go, be it Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Iraq or Egypt. But thousands of others have nowhere to go, and these are the ones suffering the most.

In his speech, Gaddafi justified his decision by claiming he wanted to prove the failure of the 1993 PLO-Israeli deal which did not give the Palestinians more than self-rule over a very small part of Palestine. He added that Palestinians should have the right to return home if real peace has been established between Palestinians and Israel. Gaddafi called upon Palestinians to gather at Libya's border with Egypt to prepare to return to Palestine.

Shortly after his speech, Palestinians started registering at offices of the Revolutionary Committees saying they wanted to return home, to Palestine. Last Friday, Libyan airplanes began carrying Palestinians gathered in Tripoli to the Libyan city of Tubruq, the necrest to the border with Egypt.

On Friday night, a group of 150 Palestinians landed at the border and were followed by a second group of 80 people on Sunday night. More are expected in the coming days. Another 120 Palestinians have also arrived at the desert camp set up by the Libyans of their own volition. They said they hoped their numbers would increase so that the whole world would notice the plight of the Palestinian people who have nowhere to go.

The most desperate among the Palestinians stranded at the camp are those who were forced to leave their homes in 1948 following the establishment of Israel. According to the Oslo deal, Israel is only committed to negotiate with the PLO over the return of the Palestinians forced to leave their homes after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. Even these negotiations are facing great difficulty in defining who is a refugee and the numbers of those who will be allowed to return.

Asked if those staying in the camp were forced to go, Khaled Mohamed, a merchant who arrived there last Friday, said "No, we came here voluntarily because we have no other place to go. We thought that by coming here, we might get the sympathy of the United Nations and international public opinion, and that we might be allowed to return to Palestine."

Mohamed Ali, a worker, said all Palestinians in Libya were now worried and confused about their future. He said that some Palestinians were arrested by the Libyan police on the streets and were told to leave. "Instead of being hassled in Libya, I decided to come here. Maybe something will happen. It can't be worse," he said.

Other Palestinians at the camp said that they were desperate to the point that their slogan now is "Either return or death."

Fayek Abdel-Alim, another worker, said, "Israelis have allowed Ethiopian Jews to go to Palestine, but we cannot, although our families and houses are there. We should be allowed to go to Palestine. If not, we will die here."

The Palestinians living in the camp are housed in around 90 tents and have no running water or lavatories. The place is full of scorpions and at least four people, including two children, have been taken to hospital for treatment for poisonous bites.

Among the Palestinians living in the camp are 50 people whom the Egyptian authorities have not allowed in because they do not carry sufficient papers to ensure that the Israeli authorities, or any other third country, will not force them to return to Egypt.

Egyptian security sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that following Gaddafi's decision to expel Palestinians, more precautionary measures are being taken to ensure that Egypt will not be their future home.

The camp itself falls under the tight control of Libyan security men. The Libyans are providing the Palestinians with drinking water, three meals a day and have turned three tents into a hospital, a mosque and a school. The Palestinian flag is raised in front of the camp and its residents said they now called it "The Camp of Return".

An Egyptian security source at the border told the *Weekly* that Gaddafi might be using the Palestinians to prove to the outside world, especially the US, that he could still be a troublemaker if sanctions imposed on his country since 15 April 1992 were not lifted.

The UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Libya for its alleged involvement in the 1989 bombing of a Pan-Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, in which 270 people were killed.

Whatever reasons Gaddafi has, it is the Palestinians who are suffering the most. "Maybe the best solution is that the world should agree on digging us a big hole and burying us alive in order to bring an end to our problem," said Khaled Abul Nil another resident of the so-called "Camp of Return".

Lebanon's forgotten prisoners

It seems to be a case of out of sight, out of mind for the detainees of Al-Khiam prison, buried deep inside the occupied "security zone" of southern Lebanon, reports **Julie Till** from Beirut

Maroum Azzi is a Lebanese Christian. He lived in a place called Jeih in southern Lebanon, inside what Israel euphemistically calls its "security zone". But Azzi no longer lives there. Released from Al-Khiam detention centre he cannot return to his village.

Azzi was taken from his home in the occupied zone five years ago after an argument with an South Lebanese Army (SLA) officer who frequented the restaurant in which he worked as a barman. The trigger for his arrest was his refusal to join the SLA, a pro-Israeli militia led by General Lahad.

The general perception is that the SLA is a Christian militia, similar to the confessional armed groups which dotted the political landscape during the Lebanese civil war. Christians do in fact dominate the officer ranks, as they do the Lebanese Army. However, ordinary soldiers are mainly drawn from the shi'ite population, which represents around 65 per cent of the population in southern Lebanon.

According to Phillip Guillard, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Lebanon, "It is a mixture of forced recruitment and economic interest. A soldier can earn more than $400 a month. In addition, one or two of his family members can work in Israel and bring back a good salary." The family of such a soldier can thus enjoy a monthly income of $1,000, compared to the average minimum wage of $150.

But if the carrot is not enough, then there is always the stick. Azzi claims that during his initial four-hour interrogation he was told over and over again by the Israeli officer questioning him: "You have two choices, prison or liberty." To make sure he understood the choices ahead of him, Azzi says he was beaten and subjected to electric shocks. As he was finally driven toward the detention centre, Azzi was warned by the Israeli officer "Khiam is a morgue. You can choose liberty or the morgue."

Indeed, it has been for 14 of its inmates according to Mohamed Safaa, secretary-general of the Follow-up Committee for the Support of Lebanese Detainees in Israeli Prisons. Another 75 are presently at risk unless they receive urgent medical treatment, warns Safaa. Released detainees have put together a list of their fellow inmates who are in a critical condition, including those suffering from tuberculosis, heart conditions, bone cancer and blindness. They report that some detainees, imprisoned since Al-Khiam opened in 1985, are "suffering from amnesia or insanity" and are heard "shouting day and night".

For Azzi the price of liberty was, as the Israeli officer explained, "joining the army and working with us". To sugar the pill, in a land still very much divided by sectarianism, the officer insisted, again and again, on the "special relationship" between Israel and the Christians. Four times the officer entered the room to tell him how much Israel loved his community. To reinforce his point, the officer said that he would bring a fellow Christian to speak to Azzi.

In fact, the Christian turned out to be the SLA officer in charge of Al-Khiam prison. Known by his pseudonym Abu Nabil, the officer did his best to persuade him to cooperate. Azzi was, however, unconvinced. "If Israel loved Christians, they would treat Palestinian Christians differently. But they are treated the same as Muslims."

With 17 politically charged religious communities in Lebanon, playing on such feelings can be a dangerous game. But not everyone is ready to join in. For Azzi the rules of the game are clear: "If I were a Muslim or a Druze, they would say they preferred Muslims or Druze. I know Israel only loves itself."

There are around 250 prisoners inside Al-Khiam. It is hard to know exactly. Neither the ICRC nor any other human rights organisation is permitted to enter Al-Khiam prison. Yet, the ICRC is allowed to visit the 72 Lebanese prisoners held inside Israel — except for Sheikh Obeid, spiritual guide of Hezbollah, and Mustafa Dirani, leader of the Islamic group Faithful Resistance, whose fate Israel has consistently linked to that of the missing Israeli pilot, Ron Arad.

The ICRC in Lebanon and Tel Aviv has been negotiating for years to get similar rights of access to prisoners detained inside Lebanese territory. Earlier this year an important breakthrough was made when, for the first time in ten years, family visits were permitted, though this right is denied to Lebanese detainees inside Israel. The importance of such a change in policy cannot be over emphasised, says Guillard — reuniting families that have been parted for up to ten years, and who previously could only wait for the release of a detainee to get information about the welfare of their son or daughter.

Reunification can be a painful experience, however. A report issued by the Follow-up Committee for the Support of Lebanese Detainees records how some detainees could not identify their parents because of amnesia brought on by their long internment. One detainee, Afif Hammoud, was not recognised by his mother because of his dramatic weight loss. Nevertheless, says Guillard, it is heartening to hear the testimonies of parents who have made a second or third visit. The psychological and physical benefits to the detainees, and their families, were enormous.

Mohamed Safaa says that contrary to popular perception those inside Al-Khiam are not just the foot soldiers of Hezbollah, but also include those who have chosen to peacefully resist the occupation. Around 10 per cent are fighters in the resistance, mainly, though not exclusively, Hezbollah supporters. The rest, according to Safaa are ordinary citizens — farmers who refuse to pay taxes to the occupying forces or teachers who refuse to teach Hebrew to their students.

The logic, argues ex-detainee Riyad Eisa, is simple: "They think that if you are not with them, you are against them." Eisa, now 27 years old, was arrested in 1990. As a student in Beirut he used to make regular journeys between his village in the occupied zone, Hibriyya, and the capital. This mobility made Eisa a potentially useful conduit of information and as such, he claims, he was approached by the SLA. When he refused to cooperate, he became a security risk, a ticking bomb, liable to go off some time in the future.

Hooded and handcuffed, Eisa says he was interrogated for four months by SLA soldiers, while Israeli officers looked on and offered "advice" during his questioning. During this time, he claims, he was subjected to electric shocks, drenched with boiling and ice-cold water, whipped, forced to crouch for long periods and hung by his arms. For two weeks he was kept on a starvation diet and refused medical help for the damage caused to his eardrum. To turn the screw further, claims Eisa, his sister was brought into the prison and threatened with rape if he did not change his mind.

Today, Eisa lives with his brother and sister-in-law in the overcrowded, poor suburbs of southern Beirut, along with thousands of other southerners who have fled death and destruction in the south. Like Azzi, he cannot go back home. Eisa still speculates about why he was released, two years after being arrested. He suggests that it may have had something to do with the release of foreign hostages, but he does not really know. For in Khiam there is no information, no lawyers, no trials. As Guillard puts it, "You know when you go in, not when you come out."

And yet while all this is going on, the rest of Lebanon goes about its daily business. It feels like a million miles away. In the clubs and bars of Beirut, mingling with Lebanon's entrepreneurs and estate agents, it is easy to forget the trade in bombs and shells going on in the south. Asked about the occupation, one schoolteacher from East Beirut immediately points northwards, to Damascus. The occupiers, he insists, wear Syrian uniforms.

As Guillard explains "For most of the Lebanese in East Beirut, Tripoli and the Bekaa the south is a foreign country." Neither its problems nor its enemies are shared. The guns may have been silenced and the barricades torn down, but for many the barriers remain intact. It seems that though there may be now one flag and one national army, there are still many Lebanons.

Edited by **Mervat Diab**

Arafat visit

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat arrived yesterday in Cairo for a short visit after a two-day stay in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. He held discussions with Yemen's President Abdallah Saleh on the current situation in the Middle East. Arafat described the Taba agreement as an important preliminary step towards PNA control over all Palestinian-populated areas in the West Bank prior to next year's legislative elections. The Palestinian leader is currently on a tour which has included Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria and Yemen.

Racing for time

TANSU CILLER, the prime minister of Turkey, is working desperately to save both her position and her pet project. She has spent the past fortnight negotiating to form a new political coalition after her own Social Democratic Party disintegrated in mid-September. However, the abrupt resignation of the speaker of the Turkish parliament on Sunday shows the prospects of political reconciliation are increasingly slim. Such political complications impair the prime minister's efforts to arrange a long sought-after customs union between Turkey and the European Community. Political experts say time spent in political wrangling is time lost before the December vote of the European Parliament that would sanction the union. The parliament has already demanded that Turkey improve its controversial human rights record, but if Ciller cannot create a new governmental coalition, she will not have time to improve her country's image before snap polls may replace her with another prime minister.

Danger signals

ISLAMISTS in Algeria killed 18 and wounded 15 people by attacking a bus in the desert province of Laghouat on Sunday. According to official statements, three children and a woman were among the dead. Though Islamists have killed more than 40 people since the government reaffirmed its intention in July to hold presidential elections, the bus attack is their most deadly show of disapproval yet. The incident took place only hours before the deadline for nominations by prospective presidential candidates. Some opposition parties object to the elections, saying the process will only increase the already chaotic struggle between the government and the militants. Security forces killed four of the bus assailants. The attack came after a general government crackdown resulting in the death of 30 Islamists in six days. Despite the violence, the election preperations continue.

Iraqi bravado?

KUWAIT announced on Sunday it was investigating reports of a troop buildup in neighbouring Iraq after Britain's *Sunday Times* reported an unusual increase in Iraqi military activity. According to the article, an additional 100 tanks and armoured personnel carriers were observed moving into southern Iraq. The newspaper also claimed that the movements monitored by Western spy satellites were a subject of intense debate in US intelligence circles. Though Kuwaiti officials said they were following up the report, Western diplomats in the country said the activity described by the *Times* was simply military vehicle repair and should not be cause for alarm. A UN resolution restricts Iraqi military activity in the south of the country.

Bahraini pardons

BAHRAIN has released more Shi'ite Muslims arrested for involvement in anti-government demonstrations. Though officials did not comment, Bahraini residents said the government released about 40 people over the weekend after talks between the opposition and the authorities. Saturday night witnessed a series of celebrations on the Gulf island to welcome home the detainees. The emir of Bahrain pardoned approximately 150 shi'ite detainees in August, and another 200 subsequently received their freedom, including prominent cleric and parliament member Sheikh Abdul-Amir Al-Jamri. The arrest of another shi'ite cleric in December sparked four months of unrest in the small island country. About 16 people were killed in the violence that followed.

Yemeni-Saudi truce

FIVE YEARS after it expelled Yemeni foreign workers, Saudi Arabia is rolling out its welcome mats once again. Employment departments at the country's Labour Ministry have been accepting requests during the past month to hire Yemenis on condition that they have Saudi sponsors. Thousands are expected to return to the kingdom, which ousted Yemeni expatriate workers in 1990 after Yemen voted against a UN resolution sanctioning the 1991 Gulf War to end the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The angry Saudi government then dealt a double blow by cutting vital economic and political aid to Sanaa and its workers to exacerbate an already weak Yemeni economy and rising unemployment rate.

Improved relations between the two countries are resulting in other benefits as well: a joint military committee began talks on Saturday to reduce the number of troops along disputed border lines, and demarcate potentially oil-rich areas on the frontier.



Summoning Soekarno's spirit

By leading Indonesia's largest opposition party, Megawati Soekarnoputri summons up the spirit of her late father Soekarno. In an exclusive interview to *Al-Ahram Weekly* she refutes that he courted controversy and highlights the role she plays as the upholder of the Soekarno legacy, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**



Soekarno in Ghana walks with waving President Nkrumah



Common concerns: Nehru and Soekarno in Jakarta 1950



Making a point with Fidel Castro in Cuba, 1960

Soekarno, the rollicking but resolute former nationalist leader of Indonesia who liberated his country from Dutch rule, was often accused of courting controversy. Megawati Soekarnoputri, his daughter, *airs the statutory paean of praise for her late father.* President Soeharto of Indonesia steps down as chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) this month but it was her father who founded the movement. How did she feel?

Megawati became a member of the Indonesia Democracy Party (PDI) in 1984 and PDI leader in 1993. She is the first opposition leader not to be handpicked by President Soeharto; he hesitated before acknowledging her nomination as PDI chief. "The ruling party at first objected to my leading an opposition party, but it later backed down and revoked its objections."

Cool and collected, it is difficult to understand how Megawati was once an active member of the militant Nationalist Indonesian Student Movement (GMNI) which she joined in 1965. "I first met Nkrumah, Nas*ser and other nationalist leaders in 1965, during the* Belgrade NAM Conference," Megawati said. 1965, of course, was the year that Indonesia invaded neighbouring Malaysia and withdrew from the United Nations. Indonesia came close to a split over the issue of the now defunct Indonesian Communist Party. Now no party advocates the socialism of yesteryear — and that goes for Megawati's PDI.

She was born in January 1947, two years after Indonesia's independence. The National Monument, Monas, in downtown Jakarta, which is a 137-metre obelisk crowned with a gold-coated 35-kilogramme flame, and the historic Hotel Indonesia are living symbols of Soekarno's Indonesia. She was extremely security conscious and could not speak with me in her office. She scribbled her address on a piece of paper and promised to tell me why her father's political career was the very *stuff of great drama. Behind the* wheel of a dark olive Mitsubishi Galant she sped away into Jakarta's horrendous rush-hour traffic.

After sunrise, the translator and I sped through the sprawling metropolis of Jakarta past the Manhattan-like landscape of skyscrapers silhouetted against a labyrinth of flyovers and spaghetti junctions to a boundlessness of suburban bungalows swamped beneath mango and banana trees. Two hours later we arrived at the driveway of her elegant villa on Jalang Kebagusan. A toffee-coloured Pekinese wagged its tail in greeting and adopted a somewhat swashbuckling stance as his mistress walked in. Megawati has pale skin in sharp contrast to many of her people's swarthy complexions. As the rest of the country moved quickly into line with the all-encompassing ideology of Golkar, the ruling party, Soekarnoputri remained a quiet rebel. There was a knowing expression in her sharp, slanted eyes.

I had first met her at her party headquarters opposite the Palestinian Embassy in downtown Jakarta standing in a packed and sweltering room of party supporters. Her office opened into a steamy corridor where party members from outlying islands quibbled over alleged human rights violations in Irian Jaya.

Wolas Krenak was the first person from Irian Jaya I had ever set eyes on. I met him at Megawati's party headquarters. Krenak is a journalist with the pro-Christian paper *Suara Pembaruan*, Voice of Renewal. The PDI seems to have more than its fair share of Christian Indonesians and other racial and religious minorities. "There is a false assumption that *many of my party members are Christian: in fact* the vast majority are Muslim, but we have Hindu, Christian and Buddhist party members too," Megawati explained. The PDI is an amalgam of the pro-Soekarno Indonesian National Party, the Indonesian Catholic Party, the Christian Parkimdo Party, and the Muraba Socialist Party.

I turned to Krenak and asked if there was racial discrimination against black people in Indonesia. His smile was evasive: "Indonesia is multiracial and concepts of race relations here differ radically from the West's," he ventured. But, I was told about Irian Jaya. Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) is a secessionist movement that is active in Indonesia's easternmost province of Irian Jaya. Like East Timor, Irian Jaya, is a relatively late addition to Indonesia and is peopled by Melanesians — racially akin to the *black-skinned inhabitants of neighbouring Papua* New Guinea. Indonesia wrenched the sparsely populated but resource-rich Irian Jaya from the Dutch in 1964 and, ever since, the OPM has been fighting intermittently for full independence for the province — Indonesia's largest.

The role of the army in government is to be curtailed, noted Megawati. There has been an unprecedented wave of promotions and transfers in the senior ranks of the Indonesian army in the run-up to the 1997 elections. Badan Inteligen Abri, Indonesia's state military-intelligence agency, has witnessed a staff turnover of almost two-thirds and all regional army commanders have been changed.

On the labour front, things are changing too. This week, *Indonesia's Supreme Court* overturned what was seen nationwide and internationally as an unjust prison sentence given to one of the country's most prominent independent trade unionists, Mokhtar Pakpahan. Pakpahan, leader of the Indonesian Welfare Labour Union, was accused of inciting labour unrest last year. In April 1994, three people were killed in rioting that rocked the capital of North Sumatra Province, Medan — a booming industrial and commercial centre.

Megawati said Indonesia's democracy movement was now stronger than ever before and dedicated to the cause of instituting a fully fledged democracy in the world's fourth largest nation. "I do know that democracy will triumph in Indonesia because it is something that the people want."

There are definite signs of democratisation in In*donesia today. Previously, all meetings of over five* people had to have special government permission. The government recently abolished all permission requirements for public gatherings. Demonstrations, though, are still banned.

And, so are provocative publications such as *Independen*, which tackled touchy subjects such as the presidential succession and the unrest in East Timor. Last March, two journalists, Eko Maryadi and Ahmed Taufik were arrested for publishing the unlicensed bulletin *Independen* and spreading anti-government propaganda.

What about anti-Soekarno propaganda? "In 1967 my father was deposed and banished to Bogor, a hillside town in West Java that is now virtually a southern suburb of Jakarta. He was under house arrest," Megawati interjected as if to change the subject. "We, *his children, were allowed to remain in the Pres*idential Palace for a couple of months but had to leave by August 1967. We then stayed in my mother's house in the Jakarta suburb of Kebagusan. My younger brother Guruh lives there today," she added. "We only visited my father when we got permission from the government. We had to have special authorisation from the Indonesian Army and separate permission from the provincial authorities; Jakarta is a special administrative territory, while Bogor is in West Java Province. It was a laborious process that entailed much bureaucracy and red tape. We did not see him regularly."

"He was a person who hated isolation. By nature he was a social being. His health deteriorated rapidly," she stressed. The army wanted to cut Soekarno down to size, and Soekarno was enfeebled by a kidney complaint and died of renal failure on 21 June 1970. Soekarno is buried in the East Java town of Blitar — his hometown. There was a state funeral. "In his will he stated that he wanted to be buried in Bogor where he spent his last days. But, the government insisted that *he be buried in Blitar,*" she explained. *After her father's* death Megawati gave up politics to devote herself to her family.

"According to the Indonesian constitution, women have equal political rights with men, but in practice women's rights are often compromised. Our traditional culture often works against women," Megawati explained. "My paternal grandmother was Balinese and my own mother, Fatimawati, was from Sumatra," she said, sinking into a comfortable sofa and clutch*ing an old family photo.*

Megawati was educated at Padjadjaran University in Bandung and graduated in agricultural science in 1967. She completed a post-graduate course in psychology at the University of Jakarta in 1972 and married a prominent businessman and fellow party member Mohamad Taufiq Kiemas, who, like his wife, is an opposition member of parliament.

The PDI has 62 members in the Consultative Assembly (Lower House) and 56 in the House of Representatives (Upper House). Most PDI support comes from the core island of Java, "but we have supporters in all the 27 Indonesian provinces," Megawati added. About 10 per cent of Indonesian MPs are women. But, 100 MPs, mostly senior army officers, are still appointed by the government. They are not elected, and there is a preponderance of militarymen in sen*sitive government positions. "Democratisation entails* curtailing the military's power. A new law comes into effect after the 1997 elections and the number of militarymen in parliament will be reduced to 75," the PDI leader explained.

What about religious minorities? In a taste of what was on the menu of the Indonesian cultural pot pourri, *a man from the Meluku islands — a remote but* politically important province — wheeled out what was doubtless a revelation: three Christian politicians were ousted from their high-profile positions in the 1992 elections. The "unholy" trio, Radius Prawiro, Andrianus Mooy and J B Sumarlin, were popularly called the RMS — a sinister reference to the Republik Meluku Selatan, a separatist Meluku organisation. *Trouble brews in the three eastern provinces of Irian* Jaya, Meluku and East Timor.

East Timor is Indonesia's latest addition, its youngest province. The integration process started in 1972. "The problem is that the Indonesian government treats East Timor as any of the 26 other normal provinces. The government's policy is therefore flawed and wrong," Megawati said. "East Timor is a newborn. It is much younger than its older siblings and so has to be treated in a different and special way just like a newborn who needs special care and attention," Megawati underpinned, exposing her unmistakable maternal instincts.

That is the point. Soeharto has succeeded in splitting the opposition by presenting himself as the nation's indisputable father figure. Golkar is supposed to represent all the political tendencies in Indonesia. *The political accommodation of moderates is the cen*trepiece of its strategy. True to its traditions, Golkar accommodated two opposition parties. On the one hand, there is a moderate Islamist opposition and, on the other, a party led by Megawati that espouses an equally watered-down version of democratic socialism. So pink socialists and lemon green Islamists vie for playing second fiddle to the ruling Golkar.

It is rumoured that Megawati married an Egyptian once, but that she was divorced because of pressure from her peers. "I love *Umm* Kalthoum, and Fairouz is my favourite Arab vocalist," Megawati chuckled, evading a direct answer.

Megawati did not go to Beijing; she visited Seoul instead. She seemed far more interested in Seoul than in Beijing. There was a conference of Asian democratic socialists in the Korean capital while the wom*en's conference in Beijing was something of a drag.*

Megawati's concern is that the benefits of the rapid economic development of the last three decades have not trickled down to a substantial segment of the country's population. So far there are no signs of open nationwide discontent developing among the 195 million people of Indonesia. The current political system *in Indonesia gives Megawati personally plenty of* elbowroom to manoeuvre but the country, like everywhere else, is still a confining prison cell for those without economic clout.

No to toxic colonialism

The international community has refused a future of toxic colonialism, banning the export of hazardous waste, writes **Gamil Ibrahim** from Geneva

Important amendments were introduced to the Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes at an international gathering in Geneva. The meeting, held on 18-22 September, took an unprecedentedly strong stance against the dumping of hazardous wastes in the developing countries of the South by the industrially advanced nations of the North.

The conference inserted a new preamble that recognised that "transboundary movements of hazardous wastes, especially to developing countries, have a high risk of not constituting an environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes as required by this convention."

The Geneva conference also inserted a new article stipulating that "each party listed in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shall prohibit all transboundary movements of hazardous wastes which are destined for their recycling to states not listed in the OECD."

Moreover, "each party listed in the OECD shall phase out by *31 December 1997*, and prohibit as of that date, all transboundary movements of hazardous wastes under the convention, which are destined for operations according to the convention, to states not listed in the OECD. Such transboundary movement shall not be prohibited unless the wastes in question are characterised as hazardous under the convention."

It is noteworthy that the technical committees will not finish classifying the toxic substances until 1997. For this reason, the ban on exports for final disposal will not go into effect until 31 December 1997. Nevertheless, the amendments are a *big victory for the nations of the South.*

Some 93 countries have signed the Basel Convention, which came into effect on 6 May 1992. For the recent amendments to become a part of the treaty, three-quarters of the member-states need to ratify them, through their national parliaments and legislative institutions.

Observers in Geneva expect countries to ratify these amendments quickly, despite the opposition of big business and industrial concerns in the North. A speedy ratification is expected because of increased environmental awareness in the industrialised nations and the political pressures *which environmentalist groups exert on Western* governments.

The idea behind these amendments was born at the second conference for member-states in 1994 out of a Norwegian proposal. The countries of northern Europe adopted the proposal and exerted pressures on the rest of the European Union. The conference's committees witnessed in the secret sessions strong opposition to the amendments from Australia, Japan, Canada, the United States, *Russia, South Korea, India, Brazil, the Philippines* and Chile, particularly on the subject of recycling. These countries import hazardous wastes at cheap prices and use them in their industries at the expense of the environment.

It is interesting that the conference's plenary sessions did not see opposition from some of these countries for domestic reasons connected with forthcoming elections and the wish to secure green votes. Another factor was the large presence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) inside the conference. In the closed sessions, on the other hand, the opposition of these countries to the amendments was very strong. Many of the developing nations of the South played an important role, threatening to expose the stand of rejectionist governments by demanding an open vote on the amendments.

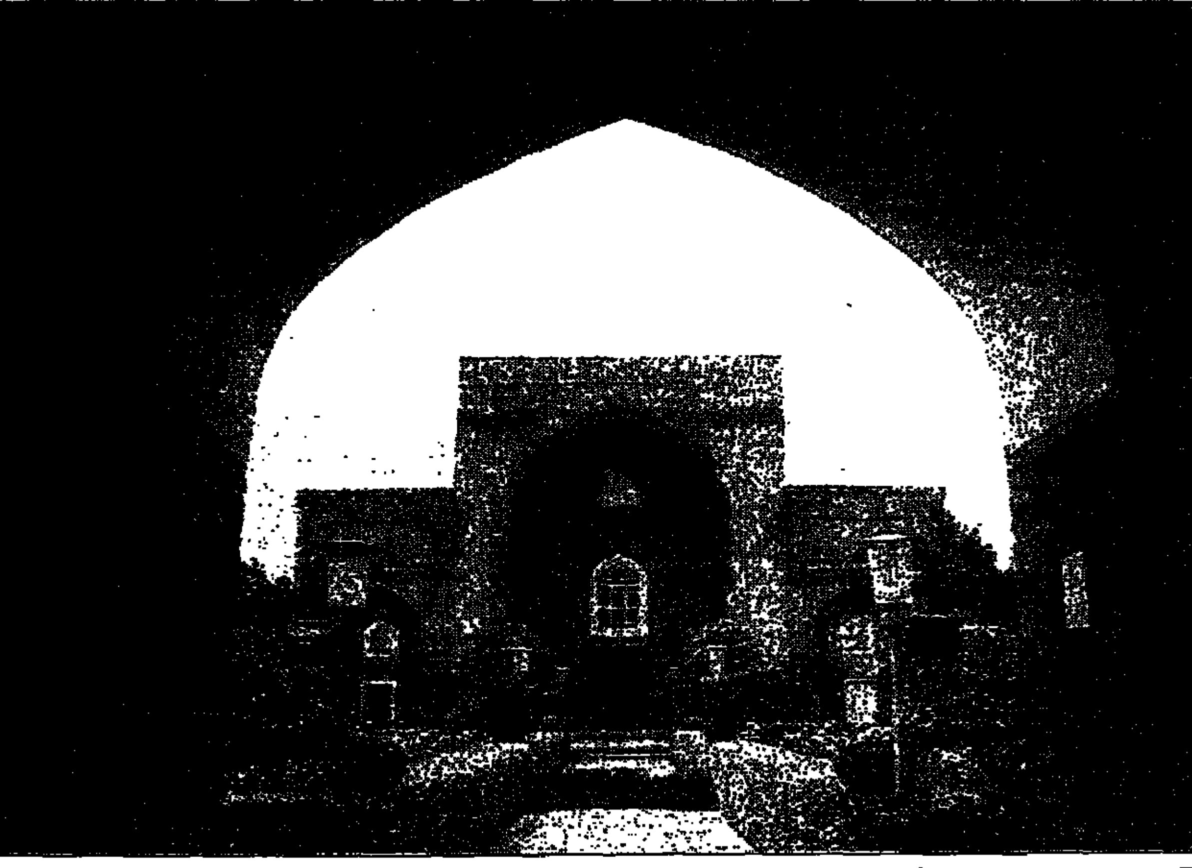
Egypt fully supported the amendments. A centre for training and technology transfer regarding the management of hazardous wastes and other wastes is to be established in Egypt. The centre will also look into ways of minimising the generation of wastes in Arabic-speaking countries in Africa.

Greenpeace reports tell that, of the 400 million tonnes of waste produced each year, *98* per cent comes from the OECD countries. The decision to ban waste exports means that fledgling markets for OECD toxic waste in Eastern Europe and Asia will be cut off. "This decision will finally force rich countries to take full responsibility for their hazardous waste production problem instead of dumping it on their neighbours," said Dr Kevin Stairs, Greenpeace's policy advisor.

The issue of toxic waste grew in significance in *the 1980s*, when the rising cost of waste disposal in Western industrialised nations drove many companies to search for countries that would ac*cept their waste at much lower prices. Out of this* situation a new profession was born: the international waste broker. The broker's profits come from exploiting the clear economic and ecological frontier running between the 25 relatively wealthy countries of the OECD and the rest of the world. This surge of trade in waste products has produced a toxic legacy.

As the International Chamber of Commerce commented, "The amendment threatens to disrupt billions of dollars of trade that has been going on for decades, particularly with nations on the Pacific rim and in South America, and the growing *trade with Eastern Europe.*"

Some Westerners have now begun to ask if the decision to impose the export ban conforms with the principles of free trade, drawn up in the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. It is therefore expected that the decision will, in the coming months, be the subject of studies and discussions in the World Trade Organisation (WTO), where the industrialised nations enjoy great weight. Unfortunately, this means the *discussions will take place away from the scrutiny* of NGOs, whose representation in the WTO has been vehemently opposed by the powerful industrialised nations of the North.



Tashkent needs a steady hand

THE FORMER Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan peers into an uncertain future as Russia withdraws its protective shield, writes **Khadiga Qassem** from the Uzbek capital Tashkent

Uzbekistan was officially incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1924, but the country never lost its cultural specificity and Islamic identity. Uzbekistan has been strategically important because it lies in the geographical heart of Central Asia. With an estimated population of 24 million, Uzbekistan is by far the most populous of the region's republics. After 71 years of Czarist and Soviet rule, Uzbekistan declared its in*dependence on 1 September 1991. Today*, as a fully fledged member of the United Nations and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), it is poised to spearhead the economic liberalisation and privatisation programme in the region.

Historically, trade routes that crisscrossed Central Asia converged on Uzbekistan. Its ancient cities of Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara were important ports of call on the famous silk road of yesteryear. But, it stagnated for long years under Soviet rule. By the time the country gained its independence, it had become clear that in order to develop its full potential Uzbekistan needed to democratise its political system and deregulate its economy. Uzbek President Islam Abdul Ghani Karimov won a decisive victory in the 1991 presidential elections. Karimov began to implement a radical privatisation *programme soon after taking office, but the* country's old legal system hindered the smooth transition from a classic Soviet-style command economy to an open market economy.

Previously, the right to initiate legislation rested with Moscow. "All legal acts adopted in Uzbekistan in the past were fully adapted to All-Union norms and never took into account the specific cultural peculiarities of Uzbekistan," Karimov explained in a book entitled *Uzbekistan: along the road of deepening economic reform* published earlier this year in Tashkent and translated into English last August.

It was impossible to obliterate the past and destroy the entire system for as the Uzbek maxim *goes: don't demolish your old* house before you build a new one. But, the new Uzbekistan had to be built on entirely new foundations. "The final objective is the construction of a strong democratic law-governed state and secular society with a stable, socially oriented economy *and open foreign policy.*" Karimov emphasises in his book.

Karimov divided his latest work into two sections. The first deals with the results and lessons of the first stage of economic reform in Uzbekistan. The second looks into the key issues and priorities of the second *stage of economic reform.* He begins by outlining the strategy and methodology, and ways of implementing economic reforms. He also reviews the institutionalisation of a new legal system that is compatible with the country's Muslim culture and that takes account of the market economy. He likewise outlines the legal foundations of the market economy as it applies specifically to Uzbekistan.

Karimov then scrutinises the entire process of privatising state assets and companies. He describes the problems that the Uzbek pioneers of privatisation had to face. Uzbekistan produced almost 80 per cent of the cotton grown in the former Soviet Union and Karimov identifies agricultural re*form as a key link in the implementation of* economic transformation.

In Cairo, the Uzbek ambassador to Egypt, Shamsuddin Babakhanov, officiated over celebrations marking the fourth anniversary of the independence of Uzbekistan this week and also the opening of a *permanent Uzbek diplomatic mission in* Cairo.

Comoros coup

LAST Thursday, mercenaries led by Bob Denard, a 66-year-old French legionnaire, captured the Comoros President Said Mohamed Djohar. On Friday, they took over the national radio station and announced the formation of a "Military Transition Committee" to rule the country temporarily.

The new military committee said it acted because Djohar had been ordered by the Supreme Court in 1991 to step down but kept himself in power. The committee accused Djohar of rigging elections, stealing public funds, taking political prisoners and of political corruption. It said the president and his ministers had resigned and all political prisoners had been freed. France, the former colonial ruler, condemned the coup, cut off all economic aid to the Comoros and put its 4,000 troops in the region on alert. The UN and the Organisation of African Unity also condemned the military takeover.

Denard, who effectively ruled the Comoros from 1978 to 1989, was forced out by French troops after the assassination of former President Ahmed Abdallah.

An estimated 900 crack French troops stormed the Comoros Island on Tuesday in a pre-dawn assault to crush the coup. French Defence Ministry officials said France *had intervened* under a bilateral defence accord of 1978.

Nigeria's woes

ON THE 35th anniversary of Nigeria's independence from Britain, the country's military strongman General Sani Abacha declared that he would not hand over power to an elected civilian administration for the next three years. Nigerian opposition figures were angered by Abacha's reneging on his promise to return the country to civilian rule and renewed their call for the ruling military junta *to step down.*

Primary and high school teachers announced an indefinite strike last Monday to press demands for better pay and job security. The strike was called by the Nigerian Union of Teachers, whose leadership said the military government would not meet their demands to pay long overdue wages and a pay hike that was promised two years ago.

They also want the establishment of a wage negotiation committee and the approval of a separate pay structure that will guarantee automatic salary hikes for them every year. The military government met some of the demands last week but many teachers stayed away from their classrooms.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Closing the Simpson saga?

The "trial of the century" is over. But, where do O J Simpson and the US judicial system go from here, wonders **Thomas Gorguissian** from Washington

At 10:00 am on Tuesday in Los Angeles, the verdict was released: Orenthal James (O J) Simpson was found not guilty of charges that he murdered Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. The defining moment had arrived, but the future of O J Simpson is unclear and that of the American legal system is in doubt.

Deliberation in the O J Simpson trial finally began — and ended — on Monday, 2 October. The speed at which the verdict was reached stunned the courtroom and the nation, proving wrong the pundits, who expected the jury to take two or three weeks before reaching its verdict. Despite major disagreement on the course and the outcome of the case, there is general agreement that it was indeed the "trial of the century".

Hundreds of citizens rushed to the Los Angeles County courthouse area. Seven of them considered themselves the lucky ones, as they had been chosen by lottery to attend the final hearing. All the national broadcast television networks (ABC, NBC and CBS), as well as CNN, showed continuous live coverage from Los Angeles and other parts of the nation as early as 3:00 am on Tuesday, Los Angeles time. From the moment on Monday when the jury foreman (a woman) announced that a verdict had been reached, a cacophony ensued, of speculation, expectation and opinions on the verdict, Simpson's future, and the national divide.

The jurors, a panel of 10 women and two men including nine African Americans, two whites and one Hispanic, spent less than four hours deliberating the verdict. They asked the court to read back parts of Allan Park's 28 March testimony. He was the limousine driver who took O J Simpson to the airport on 12 June 1994, the night of the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman.

The jurors had reached the verdict by 2:55 pm in Los Angeles. However, Judge Lance Ito said that because prosecutor Marcia Clark and lead defence attorney Johnnie Cochran were not in the courthouse, the decision would remain unannounced until 10:00 am on Tuesday.

Police officials expressed praise for the delaying of the verdict's reading, saying that it aided readiness preparations. Los Angeles police went on "tactical alert" at 6:00 am on Tuesday, stationing extra police in potential trouble spots. African American community leaders downplayed the chance of riots and civil unrest. The aftermath of the 1992 acquittal of the policemen charged with beating Rodney King is still fresh in the memory of Angelinos, African Americans and all Americans. It is hard to forget those riots, when 53 people were killed, 2,400 were injured and $1 billion worth of property damage was incurred.

For 368 days, this case — whether we like it or not — has captivated the United States. It has been a "media circus" by any standard, the big act that has monopolised American attention, mainly through television cameras, but through newspapers too. This human drama of race, fame, love, obsession and revenge has shoved aside any other event, whether national or international. During last week's peace accord signing ceremony in the White House, the O J trial was all that could be viewed on the national channels. A group of about 20 diplomats who could not get into the East Room were sent to a nearby holding room, where they were once again frustrated because nothing but the trial could be seen on the television monitors. One estimate shows that almost 40 million viewers have watched the Simpson trial on a regular basis. Whether television reflects or shapes the American taste has emerged as an issue in the wake of this "Simpson syndrome".

Closing arguments last week from both sides, prosecution and defence, dissected the case. The anatomy of the entire American social and legal system became exposed, and many described the nation as divided along racial lines. A poll conducted by the CBS television network after the closing arguments showed that 74 per cent of whites believed that Simpson was probably guilty, while a similar percentage of blacks thought he was probably innocent. Many African Americans have expressed doubt as to the fairness of the trial.

The so-called "race card" was intensively played by the defence attorney Johnnie Cochran, who compared retired Detective Mark Fuhrman to Hitler, calling him a "liar and a genocidal racist". Defence lawyers — the Dream Team, as they have been dubbed — tried to cast doubt on every facet of the gathering and examination of evidence, as well as on those who performed those tasks. Fuhrman, one of the detectives who was on the case, clearly holds racist views and has used the word "nigger" a great deal. During the last few months the whole performance of the Los Angeles Police Department has been subject to criticism and evaluation.

One of the verdicts the public has reached in this unprecedented case is that lawyers are guilty, or at least less likable than before. During the course of this trial, it has often seemed to observers that the attempt to discover the truth and serve justice was mostly neglected in favour of playing legal games. For most of the trial, one could have been forgiven for thinking that the case was not about two people who had been brutally killed. The Dream Team members' payment is extremely high. Some estimate it to be about 700 dollars per hour for a leading lawyer in the defence team. So far, as columnist Susan Estrich wrote, "the Simpson circus has cost taxpayers in Los Angeles upward of $8 million, and counting".

Besides the lawyers, the media are the other "criminals" in this case. Critics have blamed newspapers for becoming "tabloidised", that is grasping for the sensational elements of the story. Mainstream newspapers, including the most significant ones like the *New York Times*, have followed the trend. The Simpson trial, being the trial of the century, has received unusual and unexpected coverage and media focus. In contrast, the "terrorism trial" of Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman has been relatively ignored, although it is more important and more significant from a national security perspective.

The nine-month trial has offered savvy viewers a great opportunity to learn more about battered wives, the ins and outs of DNA testing, relations among the rich and famous of Los Angeles and the greed of humankind. Through the testimony of 111 witnesses — 58 for the prosecution and 53 for the defence — characters of all types appeared and were revealed in this drama.

As one media critic asked, how will CNN and others guarantee high ratings now that the Simpson circus has ended? Meanwhile, television viewers are surfing the channels looking for other things, far from the madness of Simpson mania.



photo: Reuters

Drowning the European dream

The Majorca meeting of EU leaders cast serious doubts on European unity and threatened to drive the European ship off course, writes **Hosni Abdel-Rahim**

On 22-23 September European leaders met in the Spanish Mediterranean island resort of Majorca. High on the agenda was whether or not to expand membership to include the nations of Eastern Europe now that the Berlin wall is down and the Cold War period has been relegated to the dustbin of history. Over the past few years membership of the European Union (EU) has increased from the original six to 15. But, is the union capable of absorbing the nations of Eastern Europe?

The chances that Europe will stand on the threshold of the 21st century as a united power with a political will of its own is pretty remote. Many political observers believe that the world powers will be embroiled in bitter rivalries that may boil over into open war. Trade wars are most certainly on the cards.

The ideology of a "common European culture" that has been espoused by French President Jacques Chirac does not go down well in Europe as European nations more often than not have conflicting economic interests and contrasting political agendas. France, for example has blocked moves by Spain and some other European nations to create a transatlantic free trade zone that would link North America and Europe. Officially though, France, like other European nations, is at pains to proclaim that it is as keen as anyone else in Europe to cement political and economic relations with Washington.

The foundations of economic development in the next century will rest on multinational corporations (MNCs). By their very nature, the MNCs cannot be restricted to the confines of small nation-state markets. MNCs are more suited to free trade areas that cover extensive geographical areas.

Publicly Germany and France are careful to appear on the same page in EU policy. In practice it is obvious that the two countries have differing interests. It is in this context that the real significance of the Majorca meeting remains unclear.

The issue of European monetary union caused a bit of an altercation. The Germans are unhappy with the prospects of replacing their powerful currency, the mark, with the proposed European common currency. The German central bank, the Bundesbank, objected to the inclusion of countries like Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain in the scheme because of their weak currencies, national debts and balance of payment deficits.

France came under heavy fire because of its nuclear testing in the South Pacific. France claims that the French nuclear umbrella covers Europe and that the other European nations are beneficiaries of French nuclear protection. But, France's European partners resent the manner in which the French president imposes French resolutions on the entire continent. So is a united Europe well on course to reach safe harbour by 1999?

On Holbrooke's shuttle diplomacy

US special envoy Richard Holbrooke's Balkan blitzkrieg came closest to ending the Bosnian crisis. But, the peace process itself is a euphemism for a war of attrition, reports **Ervin Hladnik-Milharcic** from Ljubljana

During the winter campaign of 1994 in Bosnia a United Nations peacekeeping force commander agitatedly put a stop to my questions about the military role of international organisations in the management of the war. He had been in the area for two years. In the middle of heavy artillery attacks against the town of Bihac, he solemnly stated, "This is not a war."

I have just witnessed an attempted offensive by Bosnian troops near Tuzla, which resulted in 15 soldiers dead and dozens wounded. The offensive was stopped by an artillery barrage that devastated the whole hill where the battle was being fought without the infantry being seriously engaged. The Bosnian troops retreated to their initial positions and licked their wounds.

"If this is not war," I protested. "What is it then?" My interlocutor was adamant. "I have seen modern wars. As a UN monitor I was in Israel in 1967. I have seen Nicaragua, Panama and the Gulf. A modern war does not last more than three days. Every five minutes a tank blows up, every 20 minutes a plane goes down. In 36 hours you run out of battalions. At the end of the first day you have either won or lost."

We jointly came to the conclusion that yes, by these criteria, what we had been witnessing during four years of conflict was not a war. It was an ongoing peace process.

When in 1992 the Serbian forces attacked Bosnia, Europe's policy towards the military seizure of most of the territory was based on opportunism and expediency. They proclaimed it not a war between two states but a conflict between abstract ethnic warring factions and insisted that this act of war was nothing but a temporary breach of a harmonious life between idyllic communities that had started hostilities for completely incomprehensible and irrational motives. The political analysis of the situation stopped there; as if wars started out of bad moods, nervousness or psychological characteristics and not simply for political control of territory. The UN forces as a supposedly apolitical military force were included as a fourth warring faction incessantly looking for the peace that was so mysteriously lost.

With the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) action against the Serb heavy artillery and command positions, the situation was changed overnight. Suddenly NATO was involved in a real war with all the global television paraphernalia of the high-tech video game show that was introduced by the Gulf War. Warring factions became targets, unassailable positions vanished and an undefeatable army, that until the day before had required hundreds of thousands of ground troops to be controlled, crumbled into disorganisation and despair.

When the peace process was transformed into war, the picture immediately cleared. Instead of the warring factions, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia appeared as negotiating partners who were forced to agree on a political solution based on a balanced military situation. The paramilitary general Mladic and his political counterpart Radovan Karadzic were out of the picture. It was the politics of Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic, representing their states, that were on the table. As the elected leaders of three nations under armed international supervision they were to decide on the issues of division of territory, constitutional structure and areas of sovereignty. The three states started negotiations which were to end the war.

This is what the United States special envoy Richard Holbrooke implicitly promised: not a ceasefire, not a temporary truce, but the end of war, the conclusion of the Balkan game. He was proceeding with the military force of the strongest defence alliance in the world supporting him and seemed unstoppable.

His advantage was that the Europeans, who had been leading the UN peace policy in Bosnia for four years, had already made all the wrong steps.

They failed to predict that the victims of aggression would not surrender. As Bosnia and Croatia persisted in their resistance, the Bosnian Serbs' fascinating superiority in military hardware slowly melted away; the arms embargo was never very effective, Bosnians and Croats captured some weapons, Serb stockpiles were depleted, their poorly maintained weapons were used up. Serbs could not finish the war and even without NATO airstrikes the balance of power would have levelled out sooner or later.

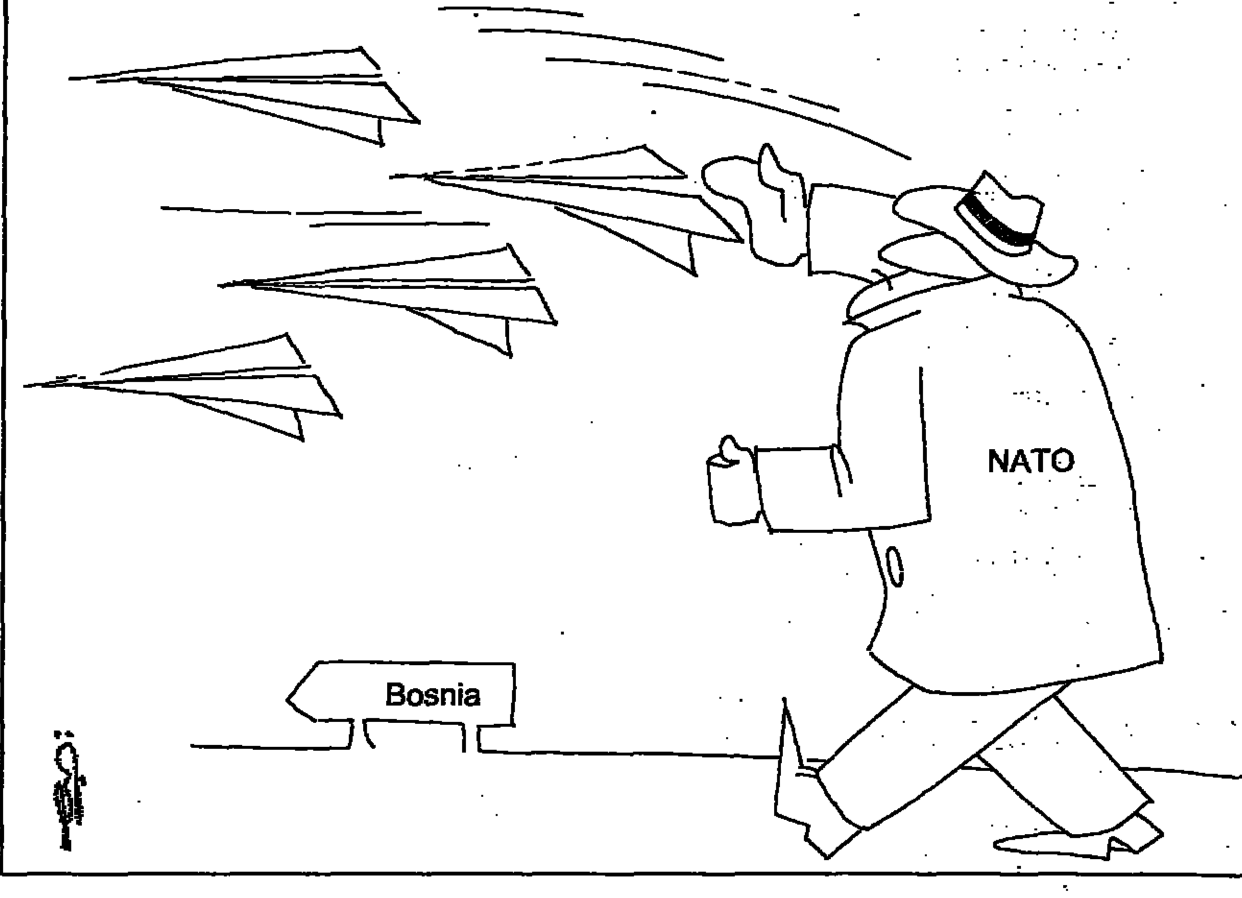
Europe's failure to understand the stubbornness and intelligence of the Balkan warriors compelled it to appease the initially strongest Serbian side and to submit to an incredible amount of humiliation. As a consequence, the European Union (EU) failed in its attempts to influence the outcome and suffered an enormous loss of political credibility, which even caused serious rifts in EU's own ranks. The lack of vision, coordinated strategy and a consistent policy bordered on political insanity which created an impossible impasse. Europe was losing political territory against a third-rate armed force engaged in a battle for a few thousand square kilometres of economically irrelevant land.

In these circumstances the war could never end. It has ravaged Croatia and Bosnia for over three years. The accumulated hatred has made any constructive dialogue between the warring states impossible.

The Americans proposed war — intensive military action instead of diplomatic meddling — as a solution. A display of power should show the Serbian forces that they could be thoroughly defeated, so thoroughly that they would forget all dreams of military victory and themselves ask for protection. Peace actions proved to be unproductive. As the Slovenian military analyst Vladimir Alkalaj recently pointed out, "The EU has proposed a number of peace plans that heavily favoured the Serbian aggressor, simply because military intervention seemed politically unaesthetic.

"The Bosnians and Croats, heavily outgunned, were forced to accept these proposals. The Serbs repeatedly rejected them since they relied on the EU's policy of appeasement to have the spoils of their aggression eventually legalised. United Europe made the same mistake as France and the United Kingdom did prior to World War II: appeasement does not stop the aggressors, it only whets their appetites. Europe's incompetence to stand up to violent expansionism has already drawn the US into two world wars and the conflict in Bosnia was dragging them in for the third time. They sidestepped Europe and, against its policy, used military force against a clearly defined objective."

American assistance has enabled the Croats to win several battles against Serbs. The US forced NATO into a bombing campaign against Serb military installations, thereby seriously reducing Serb military superiority in Bosnia. Croat and Bosnian troops are rapidly advancing and have already liberated an additional 20 per cent of Bosnia-Herzegovina territory. Now Serbs hold less than 50 per cent of Bosnia. The military action produced the exact result that the European peace plans were trying to extract from the Serbs from the very beginning and seemed unable to realise. In the light of the Bosnian-Croat military advance, US unofficial sources were even suggesting that the Contact Group's 51:49 division of Bosnia was no longer the only way out. It looked as if the Americans were prepared to let Croats and Muslims retake another 15 per cent of Bosnian territory. The Bosnian Serbs would then retain a little over 35 per cent of Bosnia, which was their share in the pre-war population. This would be a compromising reward for their aggression, but would provide enough territory for a viable state and a basis for sensible political alliances with Serbia.



The solution is pragmatic and perfectly unjust. This is not a fairy tale where the sufferers are eventually vindicated and rewarded, while villains are thoroughly punished. Bosnians will get a chance to survive and enough economic assistance to live in reasonable comfort, but they have to give up the idea of their own sovereign state within its internationally recognised borders. Future Bosnia will be under Croat hegemony, the multi-cultural society Bosnians fought for is now just a lost dream. Serbs will get to keep a lot less territory than they could have got back in 1991 merely for the asking. But Serbia itself will not suffer any ravages of war or occupation and the architect of genocide, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, will never face a war crimes tribunal, though some of his minions may have to.

So, while the EU is the undisputed wicked witch of this story, the US is not the unblemished fairy godmother. Serb military installations could have been attacked back in 1992, the war in Bosnia and Croatia could have been nipped in the bud, hundreds of thousands of innocent lives could have been saved, the terror of death and rape camps need never have happened. But then the diplomatic superiority of the US over the EU would not have been so obviously demonstrated.

And even here the Balkan trap has snapped. As long as Richard Holbrooke was talking war he was conquering political terrain as the German general, Rommel, was advancing in North Africa in World War II. His diplomatic blitzkrieg produced the impossible: the lifting of the siege of Sarajevo, withdrawal of heavy weapons. Declarations of principles were signed and a peace treaty seemed feasible. All this was happening in the shadow of NATO airplanes flying over the frontlines. The moment they were called off, the momentum was lost and Richard Holbrooke started talking about the difficulties of achieving a lasting ceasefire. The advance stopped. War, which was approaching its end, slowly slid into the interminable peace process. The armies reorganised. Heavy weapons were not neutralised; they just moved to a theatre away from the video cameras. The siege of Sarajevo was only partially lifted; the roads into the city are again dangerous and only half opened, the fighters optimistic. Maybe the game is not really over yet.

If the peace process prevails and the search for a ceasefire continues, the war could drag on for another winter or for another decade. Peace is achieved either with the military victory of one state over another or enforced by a superior military force from the outside. There is nothing in between war and peace. It is either one or the other. The peace process is just a modern euphemism for the war of attrition — definitely not a modern concept. If World War II was managed by the international community in the way the war in the Balkans has been, Britain would still be negotiating the right for limited autonomy in a "United Nazi Europe".

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

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In the fifth part of a series on Halayeb: The Secret File, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq draws on the records of the British Foreign Office to shed further light on a controversial issue

We do not favour a conspiratorial interpretation of history. We therefore reject *the premise that the "Halayeb Problem"* was created by a British conspiracy. Nevertheless, we cannot refute that "Halayeb" was the product of the policies pursued by the British government during its imperial era. This is evident in several documents from the secret file that we have at our disposal.

Before examining the policies, it is important to understand the imperial structural organisation that gave rise to the problem. At the head of this structure was the high commissioner based in Cairo and the governor general based in Khartoum. The latter, until 1924, was also the supreme commander (the sirdar) of the Egyptian army. Serving these were the British administered Egyptian military intelligence and the Cairo based Sudan Agency formed in 1903 to serve as a link between the government in Sudan, the various Egyptian ministries and the occupation army. Both were headed by the same individual, known as the "Deputy of Sudan". Count Gleshin, Edward Cecil, Major Owen, General Stack, Major Clayton and Mr Moore were among the well-known colonial figures to serve as the head of the Sudan Agency which was closely involved in the question of the Egyptian-Sudanese frontier.

Fourthly there was the Frontier Districts *Administration, established in 1917* to supervise the four border regions: The Sinai, the Eastern Desert (the Red Sea), the Western Desert and the Southern Desert. In the Red Sea region a camel cavalry manned primarily from the Abayda tribe patrolled the borders. Similar to the other colonial administrations, it was rare to see an Egyptian in an official position in the Frontier Districts Administration, which was uniformly headed by a prominent British military figure under whom served a number of colonial officers. Needless to say, the camel regiments that served them had no say in its policy decisions.

Two further authorities had a hand in implementing imperial policy with regard to the border regions. These were the Egyptian Survey Department in Cairo and the Sudan Survey Department in Khartoum. Directives to be implemented were issued in London by a triumvirate consisting of the Foreign Office, which superintended Egyptian affairs after the occupation, the War Office and the Admiralty. The Admiralty in particular was concerned with ports that might have been of service to the Royal Navy, and Halayeb was one of these.

The Halayeb problem began to emerge during the period of Anglo-Egyptian relations marked by the 1919 Revolution *and the 1953* accord granting Sudan the right of autonomy. When, in the wake of the 1919 Revolution, London perceived that the protectorate it had established over Egypt was not viable and that the fever of revolution had spread to Sudan, the government was obliged to reassess its policies. In 1920 the High Commissioner's office sent one of its most important officials, Mr Ken Boyd, to Khartoum to determine whether, in *view* of developments in Egypt, the Egyptian military or civilian presence in Sudan should be brought to an end. Boyd recommended a complete evacuation of Egyptians from Sudan and his recommendation was implemented four years later in 1924.

At the beginning of the British occupation, Lord Cromer said, "We do not govern Egypt, but rather we govern those who govern Egypt." In the wake of the 1919 Revolution which had a close bearing on events in Sudan, the spirit of colonial policy with regard to Sudan and the evacuation of the Egyptian presence was based on a modification of this saying: "We do not govern Egypt, but rather we govern that which controls Egypt." — i.e. the Nile, the single most important key to controlling Egypt.

The process of eliminating the Egyptian presence from Sudan went hand in hand with attempts to gain territorial advantages for Sudan, notably along the administrative border region between the two countries. Attempts to modify the *regional map are fully documented in* confidential Foreign Office documents, and the most notorious attempt took place in 1924, at the climax of the crisis in Anglo-Egyptian relations. In this instance, the Foreign Office files reveal a certain confusion in the Military Survey directorate. Should the boundaries defined by the Egyptian survey map of 1909 be recognised as the international border between the two countries as distinct from the administrative boundary designated in the War Office map? The Foreign Office opted for the latter as is evident in the communiqué which read, "...subject to the concurrence of the Sudan Government, it is proposed to accept the view of the General Officer Commanding British Troops in Egypt that the political boundary, viz., the twenty-second parallel of latitude, as defined in the Cromer-Boutros Agreement of 1899, should be adopted now and in future as representing for all purposes the frontier between the two countries." The decision was to have important ramifications.

In his doctoral dissertation, Dr Al-Bakhari Abdallah enumerated seven atlases, six published in London or Oxford and one published in Amsterdam, all of which indicate the administrative boundary as the international political boundary *between Egypt and Sudan. Perhaps* this Sudanese scholar was unaware of the history behind these atlases. In one of the Foreign Office files we saw a letter to the Foreign Office from the Chicago based Rand-McKinley publishing firm. The letter, dated 1928, enquired as to whether the political or the administrative boundary was the officially recognised international boundary be*tween the two countries. The firm pub*lished its atlas based on the Foreign Office's response in favour of the latter. All the other atlases mentioned by Al-Bakhari followed suit.

On two occasions, the survey authorities in Cairo and Khartoum attempted to define the now combined administrative and political boundary on the ground. The first took place in 1923 when the Halfa directorate asked to conduct a new survey of the area. It hoped to determine the demarcation to be marked on the survey maps as a permanent reference in the event that the signposts were shifted or removed over time. On this occasion, the Sudan Agency in Cairo, which regulated relations with Egypt, rejected the request on the grounds that it was not an appropriate time to submit the proposal to the Egyptian government.

The second attempt took place in 1941. This time officials in the Egyptian Survey Department petitioned the Sudan Agency to create a joint committee from the Egyptian and the Sudan Survey Departments in order to "chart the area preliminary to submitting proposals with regard to the demarcation of the boundaries between the two countries, in agricultural and desert territories, so that once an agreement is concluded between the two governments it will be possible *to place clear signposts along the border* and to chart these clearly on the maps."


Sir Miles Lampson, British ambassador

It took two years for the proposal to receive a definite response from the Foreign Office. In a statement dated 2 August 1942, it said, "We have no objection that a committee composed of representatives from the Egyptian and Sudanese Survey Departments be charged with placing permanent sign*posts along the line demarcating* the boundary between the Aswan and Halfa directorates and to chart these on the maps. However, it should be noted in this regard that article 11 of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between Egypt and Great Britain sustains the question of sovereignty over Sudan, although the Egyptian government still demands this sovereignty. The matter should therefore not extend to determining the political boundaries between the two countries. Rather the committee's task should be restricted solely to the administrative aspect. Thus, in the hope of demonstrating the technical and administrative nature of the committee's work, it is deemed advisable not to submit the issue to the Council of Ministers, but rather to the Minister of Finance who has the authority to handle the matter through direct communications between the Egyptian and Sudanese Survey Departments, without any official intervention on the part of the Prime Minister."

Although these communications were fruitless, it is important to note that officials in the legal department of the Foreign Office were keen to preserve the administrative character of the arrangements that were adopted in 1899 and 1902. At the same time, the question *of the demarcation of administrative* boundaries was restricted to the boundaries between Halfa and Aswan, i.e. in the area of the Nile. It did not approach the borders in the Red Sea area. More significantly, the proposals belie the Sudanese claim that the arrangements concluded in the 1899 and 1902 decisions had established clearly defined borders. If this had been the case, the Sudan Survey Department would not have had to go to such lengths in its repeated requests to clarify the lines of demarcation.

In short, the Egyptian-Sudanese border had not been demarcated on the ground, and the contention that the stone located in Faras, on one side of which is written "Egypt" and on the other side of which is written "Sudan", is evidence of the process of demarcation comes as a shock to anyone who has the slightest knowledge about the history of the demarcation of the borders.

The 1953 agreement for Sudanese autonomy has also stirred controversy with regard to the Sudanese-Egyptian border in the Red Sea area. According to some Sudanese, the parliamentary elections called for in the agreement, included the Halayeb triangle and therefore constitutes a tacit Egyptian recognition that Halayeb falls within the Sudanese borders.

To address this argument, one must refer to the schedule of electoral districts that was appended to the agreement. The *first part of the schedule considers the* senate electoral districts. These were divided along the lines of the provincial directorates and only the names of the directorates are mentioned. The second part comprises the electoral districts for the House of Representatives elections. It lists 35 districts including names of urban centres within them. Nowhere is there mention of Halayeb or any other cities in the Halayeb triangle. The third part comprises the districts in which indirect parliamentary elections were to be conducted. This part lists 57 districts numbered from 36 to 92. Here we note the district No.70 which was called "Al-Amrar and Bashariyiin", and which is frequently taken by the Sudanese to refer to the Halayeb triangle. Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine whether or not *this is a reference to the* Bichari tribes located in "Egyptian government territories" in the words of the 1902 decision. Rather, one supposes that these indirect electoral divisions, unlike direct elections, were not so much determined by region as they were by certain population conglomerations wherever they were located. In other words, it is possible that the elections never took place in Egyptian territories that were under Sudanese administration, but among the tribes that were considered subject to the *Sudanese government*. As *such*, the rights of territorial sovereignty would not come into question, particularly since the area at any rate was still under joint Sudanese-Egyptian administration. Moreover, any attempts on the part of the Egyptian government to prevent the election of Bichari representatives would have had political repercussions that Egypt would have wanted to avoid at that time.

In spite of all its attempts to transform the administrative boundaries into the international political boundaries, London was quick to alter its stance once it perceived this was no longer in its interests. One example is a letter dated 23 January 1941 from the governor general in Sudan to the British ambassador in Cairo. commenting on the 1936 accord, he wrote "The area located between the political and administrative boundaries has been unofficially designated as Egyptian. We prefer to keep it that way." We read of a second instance in the London *Times* of 26 February 1958 in which one of the British officials of the Frontier Districts Administration recalls, "In 1919 we received instructions to retain the Egyptian squadron in the port of Halayeb which remained within the scope of my patrol until I left Egypt in 1922." A third and salient occasion occurred in 1958 when Sudan submitted a complaint to the Security Council over what it termed an Egyptian assault on Halayeb. The British representative asked his government to *inform him of the legal status of the* area and the Foreign Office turned the matter over to its legal advisor, Mr F A Vallet. In a lengthy memorandum, he concluded that if Egypt and Sudan were to submit their cases to international arbitration, Sudan's case with regard to the Wadi Halfa projection would be very strong; however, with regard to Halayeb, the reverse is true and Egypt could easily win its case." Vallet based his findings on the fact that, in spite of the presence of a Sudanese administrative centre and police force in the region, no Sudanese Defence Force had ever entered the area. Conversely, Egyptian forces had entered the region and could come and go without any questions asked by the Sudanese government. Moreover, licences to mine in the region continued to be issued from Cairo. Based on this memorandum, the Foreign Office instructed its representative in the Security Council to give no political support whatsoever to the Sudanese party, regardless of British government sympathies in the Nasser era.

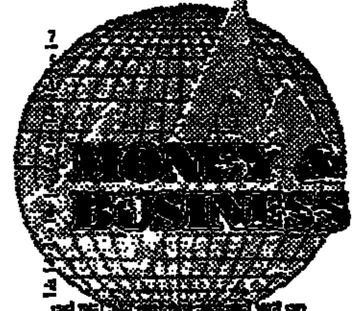

The author is a renowned historian and a professor of modern history at Ain Shams University.

Conference on power projects

A conference on power projects began last Tuesday in Cairo hosting 200 delegations from neighbouring European and Mediterranean countries. Also participating in the event were representatives of local and foreign banks.

The Cairo power conference is being held to seek means of meeting current and future power needs. The results of the conference will be discussed next month at the European and Mediterranean countries foreign ministers meeting, scheduled to take place in Barcelona, Spain.





Rebuilding Bosnia

The foreign ministers of the European Union (EU) will review means of reconstructing Bosnia after years of war. The issue was brought up at the foreign ministers meeting after the unexpected success of US envoy Richard Holbrooke's mission, which will pave the road for a comprehensive settlement in the war torn area.

The EU is also considering providing aid for the venture but will only grant a sum if proof that human rights are respected is shown. The cost of rebuilding Bosnia is estimated at $4 billion.

Duty free shops in Dubai

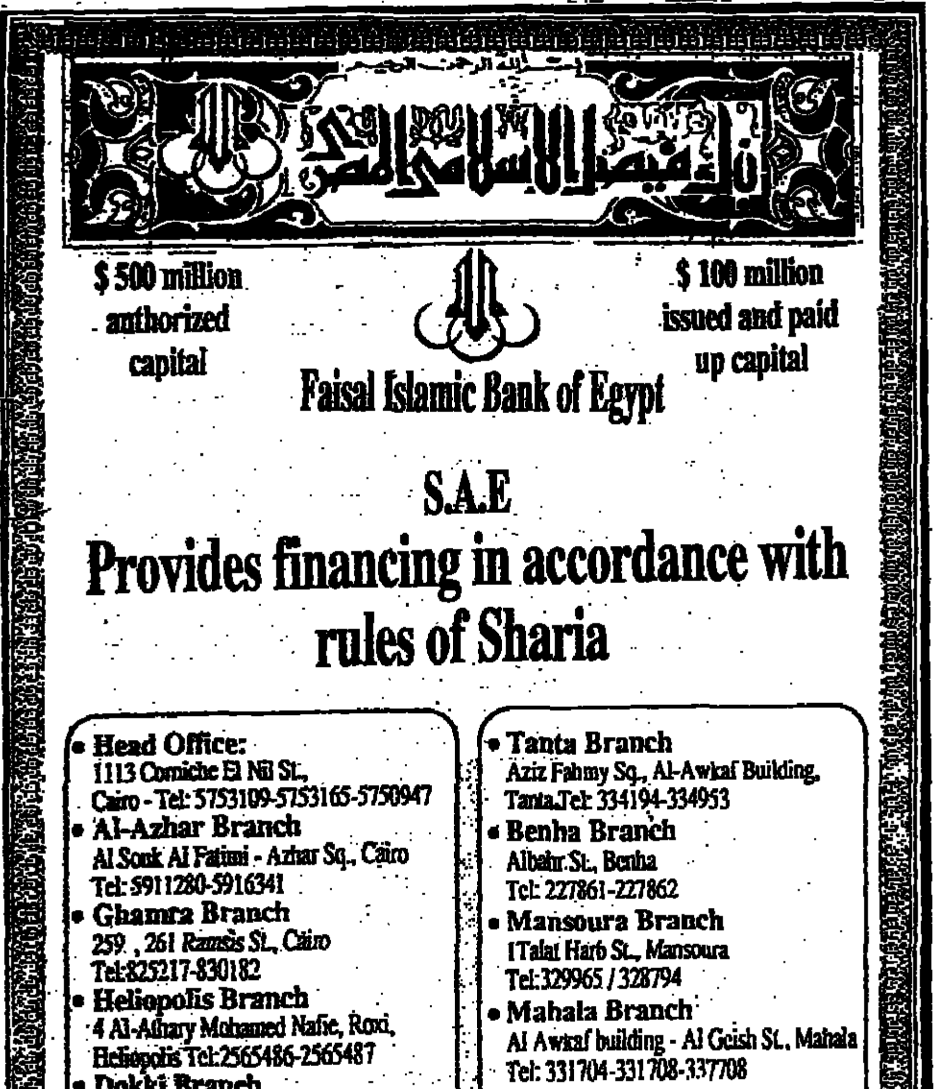
The UAE is planning to expand the duty free shops in its international airport to become the biggest duty free in the world

Anita Mahra, marketing and public relations manager, said that this plan is part of the airport expansion project. The first stage of the project will cost $750 million and will enable the airport to receive 12 million passengers annually. Mahra said, in an interview with El-Sherouk magazine.

Algeria encourages investment

The Algerian government is adopting a strategy aimed at enhancing development in its southern provinces. In this context the government has decided to provide facilities and tax reductions. Income tax will be reduced by 25% for commercial and investment *activities in the provinces.* Privileges will also include 7 year exemption from taxes imposed on companies and industrial ventures in the area.





The price is not the final arbiter

For those seeking high performance and value, Advanced Business Systems (abs), offers the full range of international IBM products, with a 3 year warranty, overseen by the abs support and maintenance department.

The company also offers training programmes to corporate companies and individuals on Microsoft and Novell products in its fully equipped training Centre. Soon abs *will offer a wide range of Lotus courses at the centre fol*lowing the great boom resulting from the IBM-Lotus merger earlier this year.

The abs technical team also carry out the design and implementation of networking infrastructure with a level of quality and performance that are highly commendable. Bearing in mind the technological advances of tomorrow, abs builds systems that will meet the demands of growing industry at the highest level of efficiency.

The most important networking project assigned to abs, is that of the African Export/Import Bank. The project en*tailed a large network equipped with the latest fibre-optic* cables and equipment. The network supports up to 100 Mega Bytes per second transfer speed, allowing for high productivity and faster access to the technology installed.

Al-Ahram Weekly

A question of consensus

With only a few months' respite from arduous negotiations, the focus is now on securing peace on the ground. The essential prerequisites essential for guaranteeing prompt and continuing implementation of the latest Israeli-PLO agreement are rapidly crystallising.

A sense of urgency is replacing donor reservations over the lack of Palestinian institutional frameworks. Today, negotiators, mediators and donors acknowledge that financial support for Palestinian self-rule must be expedited and extended.

Attention is turning to the other missing components in the peace jigsaw. These include maintaining social order in Israeli and Palestinian streets, dismantling the psychological barriers dividing the two peoples directly concerned, and intensifying efforts to tackle the deadlocked Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

Winning public support in favour of the agreement lies at the core of such endeavours. However, room for manoeuvre is constrained by the practical implications of events as perceived by the man in the street.

A replay of the familiar scenario of closures and daily clashes in the West Bank and Gaza only heightens Palestinian economic dependency on Israel and further restricts the PNA's independence when it comes to economic policy-making. It remains doubtful whether a divided public opinion would tolerate an integrated Israeli and Palestinian economy.

Wider support from the four million Palestinians living in Arab countries cannot be sustained if they are constantly reminded that they can be expelled at will, as happened recently in Libya.

Inside Israel too there is discontent despite the step-by-step withdrawals. Rabin is likely to win today's Knesset vote on the agreement but with a slim margin, thus fuelling fears of a diminishing political legitimacy.

What earthly use is there in taking a tougher line on Palestinians while adopting a lenient stand towards Israeli rejectionists? And can genuine peace, which can only be sealed with the backing of the public, survive while ordinary Israelis and Palestinians remain streets apart?

Orchestrating action post-Oslo

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed asks if the Oslo 2 agreement signed last week has brought peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis closer, or whether it has made it yet more remote

Scandinavian countries are well known for their philanthropism, good will and social-democratic traditions, and, as such, have often helped overcome relentless conflicts in various parts of the world.

It keeping with this tradition, Oslo served as the venue for the secret Palestinian-Israeli talks, which culminated in the signing of the Gaza-Jericho agreement — now known as Oslo 1 — on 13 September 1993 at the White House. On 28 September 1995, a second agreement — dubbed Oslo 2 — was signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the transfer of control in much of the West Bank to its Palestinian residents, in a ceremony that was also held at the White House and attended by President Clinton, President Mubarak and King Hussein. If opinions have been divided on both sides of the confrontation line over Oslo 1, they are even more divided over Oslo 2.

To give one striking example: the PLO Executive Committee meeting held to vote on the agreement was attended by 10 members out of 18, with 8 members boycotting the meeting, including Farouk Kaddoumi, the second man in Fatah and particularly competent on the issue in his capacity as foreign minister of the PLO. Of the ten members who attended, one abstained, so that finally the agreement was endorsed by only 9 of the 18 members. And even these nine expressed reservations on at least one crucial issue, namely, the absence of a clear timetable for the redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank. Can this be considered a real endorsement of the agreement? And, given the controversy surrounding it, can Oslo 2 be regarded as a step in the right direction towards a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, or will it, rather, feed frustrations and create still more havoc throughout the region?

One should remember that the main aspect of the Oslo 1 agreement, which was assessed worldwide as a giant leap forward towards peace, was the 'mutual recognition' it entailed between Israel and the PLO, symbolised by the handshake between Arafat, Rabin and Peres, under Clinton's benevolent sponsorship on the lawn of the White House. It was the first time the state of Israel officially acknowledged the fact that the Palestinians constituted an independent entity, with legitimate rights as a community and not simply as individuals, the first time also that it recognised Arafat, the leader of the organisation which had fought for the right of Palestinians to self-determination, as the best interlocutor to speak in their name, after having dismissed him for years as a terrorist. On the other hand, and although the Palestinian Covenant calling for the destruction of Israel has not been formally revoked, Israel's existence is now accepted by the party in whose name Arabs justified their policy of non-recognition and boycott of the Jewish state.

This mutual recognition between the two key parties to the conflict was interpreted by many as implicitly acknowledging some form of parity between them. Some observers went as far as to read into it the replacement of the previous 'balance of power' approach, tested every day through violent action on either side, notably during the infitada, by a so-called 'balance of interests' approach, based on the acknowledgement that the other has legitimate rights, which is the underlying concept of the 'mutual recognition' approach. But the experience of the last two years exposes the fallacy of these assumptions.

Mutual recognition need not entail parity and symmetry in any form. When 'mutual rejection' is no longer possible, and some form of accommodation between the protagonists becomes unavoidable, 'mutual recognition' can become a polite, diplomatic formula to express 'mutual instrumentalisation', each party trying to use the other to his benefit. Obviously, in such a situation, the stronger party is better placed than the weaker to reap all the fruits of such a game, and 'mutual recognition' can easily become the means by which the stronger party bends the weaker to its will, thus eliminating it through diplomatic, nonviolent means as an enemy and a threat, and transforming it into a 'tool'.

In other words, the Oslo 1 agreement built Palestinian-Israeli relations on two discordant patterns that overlapped and interacted: that of 'mutual recognition', carrying the potential of a balanced relationship between the parties; and that of 'mutual instrumentalisation' which, given the disparities of the parties, carried the potential of a *diktat* imposed by the stronger on the weaker. Hence, the main question becomes which of the two patterns will prevail: is 'mutual recognition' being used by Israel as a means to manipulate the Palestinian Authority, thus perpetuating the conditions of mutual mistrust and tension, or are we seeing the establishment of a relationship conducive to mutual trust and confidence and paving the way to genuine peace?

A tentative answer to this question is implicit in Oslo 2 whose provisions are more likely to favour the first pattern. For example:

* Israel's insistence on provisions for protecting the 450 Jewish settlers in Hebron overrode Palestinian demands that it be treated like the rest of the major towns in the West Bank. Contrary to the rule established in Oslo 1, an Israeli military presence will remain in Hebron.
* The issue of water and how it should be shared between the parties was delayed, thus accumulating difficulties ahead rather than removing them as obstacles on the way to peace. Experts warn that the coming conflict in the Middle East will be over lack of water.
* Initially, the issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israel should have been solved before Oslo 2. Oslo 2 does not solve it entirely. The prisoners will be released in three consecutive stages, with no specific Israeli commitment concerning the last stage.

In the final analysis, Oslo 2 has only strengthened the resolve of the opponents of the agreements on either side. Can the intervention of external parties, both on the global and regional levels, help overcome the growing tensions in the relations between those, on either side, who have shocked their respective constituencies by making concessions conceived by these constituencies as unacceptable in the name of peace? So far, and at least as far as Arafat is concerned, external intervention has not made it easier for him to claim that the lot of the Palestinians has improved in any significant manner with the advent of the 'peace' accords.

Sharing the future

As the UN celebrates its 50th anniversary, parliamentarian **Mona Makram Ebeid** examines past and future prospects for the world organisation

This year the world organisation celebrates its golden jubilee. The occasion has already been marked by the publication of scores of studies. Conferences, commissions, investigations and hearings, both within and outside the UN, have been convened with seeming abandon. And all of them focus on a single question: How can the international system be improved?

I had the opportunity to participate in two such events. The first took place at the UN headquarters in New York, within a special session of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, headed by the council president, Dr Fathy Sourour, and attended by the secretary-general, Dr Boutros Ghali. We gathered together to discuss "the parliamentary vision for international cooperation into the 21st century". Among many other topics, the agenda included ways to increase parliamentary involvement in the activities of the UN. The second event took place in Japan, in the city of Gifu, and was co-sponsored by the Centre for the Support of the UN and Parliamentarians for Global Action, an international grouping of parliamentarians.

Both events reflected the profound transformations undergone by civil society and the increasing importance attached to organisations that operate independent of national governments. And the UN, an association of sovereign states, has been quick to respond to the rapidly-growing importance and power of non-state actors such as the media, business and academic communities.

Any plan aimed at improving the operation of international machinery would be seriously flawed if it failed to take account of the growing willingness, on the part of many of the components of civil society, to engage in direct action. Since the end of the Cold War international agencies, both within the UN and including innumerable non-governmental bodies, have actively pursued policies that have been consistently more realistic than those promoted in previous decades. The realism of these policies grows from an enhanced awareness of the interconnectedness of agendas for real improvement: economic growth, environmental protection, population control, the status of women, migration, jobs, investment, education, human rights and democracy are inextricably linked and must, therefore, be taken into account in assessing the likelihood of successfully improving the lot of the poorer half of humanity.

At both events I attended a common thread ran through the discussions, as speaker after speaker argued that concerted action should be taken not, as in the past, as a humanitarian response to a specific disaster, but because such action was part and parcel of the recognition of a common destiny, of our shared stewardship of the future.

Our deliberations took into account the UN's many achievements, its success in eradicating disease, immunising children and providing food and shelter to refugees and victims of natural disasters. The UN has done valuable work in helping many countries make the successful transition from colonial dependence to self-rule and self-sufficiency. It has worked to control runaway population growth and rampant environmental destruction. Its blue-helmeted volunteers have kept the peace more often than they have failed. In other words, despite setbacks, the UN has managed to evolve in a way that is in keeping with the concerns of the times.

It would be wrong, though, to present such discussions as happening exclusively between UN enthusiasts. At both the events I attended the UN's structure, mandate and resources came in for wide-ranging criticism and many expressed disappointment at its bungled peacekeeping performances in Somalia and Bosnia.

The UN system could, it was argued, with the necessary authority and resources, develop into an effective global security system. Yet no matter how flexible, how efficient a reactive institution, it remains incapable of dealing with the sources of violence, sources almost invariably rooted in the poverty and socio-economic ills that wrack our planet. Consequently it was argued that, in order to ensure a more durable basis for "human security", the world organisation should devote its attention to helping member states in their struggle for prosperity and social peace. Only then will the UN be addressing causes in addition to symptoms.

Today the UN faces a major paradox. It is being asked to play an ever greater role, in an ever increasing number of fields, ranging from human rights to environmental protection, at a time when governments are anxious to reduce their financial contributions and increasingly reluctant to provide the necessary political, military and material support.

So what have these conferences accomplished? Certainly they have helped to focus attention on the most important of the problems facing humanity as the world enters the 21st century. They have drawn attention to the urgent need to correct imbalances in wealth and resources and in demographic trends and they have helped to underline the connections between the two. What they have thrown into relief is a world comprising a small number of rich, satiated, demographically stagnant societies and a large number of poverty-stricken, resource-depleted nations whose populations are doubling every 25 years or less. To continue in this pattern is inconceivable given our belated recognition of interdependency. No nation can seek to improve its lot heedless of deprivation and insecurity elsewhere. People are charged not only with being neighbours — this is, after all, an accident of fate — but with being good neighbours, which requires the exercise of will.

The problems faced by the international community are huge: they range from poverty, epidemics and environmental pollution to ethnic conflicts and refugees. Only a joint international response transcending national borders can hope to tackle such issues.

We are at the threshold of a new era. We face many important choices. What we do now will dictate our shared future. The deliberations I attended afforded opportunities for the emergence of a new parliamentary partnership, equipped to make a significant contribution towards greater international cooperation, which must surely be the goal of the 21st century.

If the world organisation is to gain the respect of peoples everywhere, it will have to develop effective partnerships across the whole human spectrum. Only then will the United Nations be recognised as the best hope of human kind as it confronts the dangers that lie ahead.

Serving two masters

By Naguib Mahfouz

It is difficult to combine two professions. I have never wanted to do anything more than write and have always been surprised at the ability of some people to continue writing while practicing professions far removed from the humanities. Nothing amazes me more than the doctor poet.

Poetry is the result of sudden bursts of inspiration: a poet may receive the inspiration for a poem while sitting on a bus or tram and be able to complete his poem as soon as he gets home. Novels and plays, on the other hand, are the result of many hours of work.

Ahmed Shawki, sitting on the tram, would often be inspired to write, whereupon he would produce his packet of cigarettes and scribble lines on the back of the box so as not to forget them before he got home. Of course cigarette boxes really were boxes in those days, and so one could write a rather long poem on one.

Journalism is rather different, even though it may seem to be in direct contradiction with the arts and letters. Style and treatment are utterly different, but organisation is all important. One must think only of structure. If a person can organise his time and thoughts, he can follow both professions, as did Ihsan Abdel-Qaddous and Youssef El-Sibai.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

Free elections

The national and party press this week concentrated on the post-signatory phase of the Washington agreement to extend Palestinian self-rule and on the general election battle due to start next month.

In **October** magazine, Editor-in-Chief **Ragab El-Banna** wrote his weekly article under the headline "We have taken the first step towards setting up a Palestinian state" in which he said in reply to the agreement's critics: "How can we oppose an agreement which, even its critics admit, will extend Palestinian authority over a wider domain than it has today? At the moment Palestinian authority does not extend beyond Gaza and Jericho. After the agreement it will extend to most of the West Bank. Is this better or worse?

> *'How can we oppose an agreement which, even its critics admit, will extend Palestinian authority over a larger domain than it has today? At the moment Palestinian authority does not extend beyond Gaza and Jericho. After the agreement it will extend to most of the West Bank. Is this better or worse?'*
>
> **Ragab El-Banna**

And if the agreement, according to its critics' admission, will lessen the area of Israeli dominance, and lighten Israel's iron grip as well as extend Palestinian sovereignty many times over and give the Palestinians new responsibilities, is it not better for the Palestinians? Or is it better that they should not gain this much freedom, authority and land?

On Saturday **Al-Wafd** published a front-page editorial entitled "Congratulations to the Palestinians on their new state" in which it said: "It is certain that there has been a positive change in the Israeli mind in the same way that there has been a positive change in the Palestinian mind. And a meeting half way is better than no agreement at all. The time is ripe for the Palestinian fighter to relax and to respond to international developments and the new thinking which has spread in the region. We say to those involved: Do not waste an opportunity to set up a Palestinian state by demanding everything at once including throwing the Jews into the sea. One should not forget that at present the Israeli presence is hard to ignore."

Mahmoud El-Saadani wrote in his **Al-Mussawar** weekly column: "I was greatly moved by the picture of Yasser Arafat after his initialling of the agreement to redeploy Israeli forces in the West Bank. He looked similar to Saddam Hussein after the 'Mother of All Battles' war. But there is a wide difference between the two men. Saddam waged a war and was defeated while Arafat negotiated and was defeated.

"Some Arabs have given up the Palestinians and looked to their own interests with the Israelis like Jordan and Qatar. If there was a solid Arab front backing the Palestinian negotiator then the Israeli negotiator would not have had the upper hand in demanding the surrender of the Palestinians. But, unfortunately, Arab ranks are divided. Arafat has my full sympathy; the Zionists failed to kill him on the battlefield, but they will succeed in killing him over the negotiating table."

In **Akhbar Al-Youm** we find Editor-in-Chief **Ibrahim Saada** attacking President Clinton for not giving Egypt and President Mubarak their due in his address during the signing ceremony.

He also attacks President Clinton over another statement: "It is the US president's opinion, in reply to a question by Israeli TV, that Jerusalem, from the historical point of view, is the capital of Israel.

"He went on to say that all foreign embassies in Israel, including that of the US, would one day move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This brazen statement will undoubtedly be made use of to cloud the peace process in its entirety and to cast doubt on many positive achievements that are in the interests of the Palestinians."

On Libya's hostile stance towards the Palestinian-Israeli agreement and its recent policy of expelling Palestinians from its soil, **Salama Ahmed Salama** said in his daily column in **Al-Ahram** on Sunday under the headline "Libya: until when?": "Whatever the Libyan viewpoint is on the peace process as a whole, it is inadmissible and a violation of human rights that the fate of thousands of Palestinian families should be endangered by using them as political pressure cards. These pressure cards will have no effect on Israel and the US and will not lead to a change in US policy on Lockerbie.

"The only possible result of such a policy is that many Arab states will desist from helping Libya and standing alongside it in its crisis with the West. This may not bother Colonel Muammar Gaddafi since it is the Libyan people who will pay the bill."

On the same day, **Mohamed Abdel-Moneim** wrote in **Al-Ahram**: "One of the strangest aspects of peace is that the wars between us and Israel did not last more than days while the peace between us is now in its 18th year. But that peace is still not complete. In stark contrast to this, wars round the world have lasted for many a bitter year while making peace has taken only days or months. It is not so much a question of historical roots as much as it is a totally different mentality. A 'Middle East mentality' carries with it all the contradictions of the world."

In **Al-Ahrar** Editor-in-Chief **Mustafa Bakri** wrote in his front-page column: "Yesterday Rabin spoke of the land of his ancestors. He said defiantly, 'This is the land of our fathers and grandfathers'. He pulled out his tongue and gave us a foreboding of the hegemony to come at his hands. It was a depressing sight; the dreams of the nation scattered while the Israeli flag flew triumphantly.

"The signing ceremony ushered in a new era in which Israel will be part of the tapestry with the Arabs legalising its occupation and agreeing to the setting-up of settlements and the break-up of the Palestinian nation.

"No one can convince any member of this nation that Palestine has returned or that this agreement will see the creation of the state of Palestine."

With the approach of the next general elections, the satirical writer **Ahmed Ragab** wrote in his front-page column in **Akhbar Al-Youm**: "This nation, which is often belittled and exploited, has expressed its opinion in all elections by boycotting polling booths; the giant Egyptian nation refuses to be represented by pygmies."

In **Al-Mussawar** Editor-in-Chief **Makram Mohamed Ahmed** devoted his weekly article to the subject under the headline "The 1995 elections: preliminary thoughts". He said: "The participation of the opposition parties in the next general elections will undoubtedly enliven the political scene. It may bring the silent majority out of its isolation and increase participation in the cities where attendance has reached deplorable levels. It is a shame to find a candidate succeeding with 2,000 votes in a constituency of 100,000 voters. The masses' going to the polling booths is the surest guarantee of democracy and of the integrity of the elections. It is also the guarantee for a deputy being of good reputation and devoted to the nation's interest.

"Unfortunately our parties are pre-occupied with imaginary battles revolving around lists, the presence of judges and the Emergency Law while the crux of the matter is that the voter should turn up."

This last paragraph prompted **Adel Hussein**, secretary-general of the Labour Party, to attack Ahmed in **Al-Shaab**, organ of the Islamist-orientated Labour Party, on Sunday.

> *'I want the next elections to be an open political forum and an opportunity for dialogue between all candidates. We do not want one party dominating all rostra, all TV channels and all radio stations. We want to give all parties, big and small, the chance to express their opinions through TV and radio'*
>
> **Mustafa Amin**

And in **Al-Akhbar** veteran columnist **Mustafa Amin** wrote: "I want the next elections to be an open political forum and an opportunity for dialogue between all candidates. We do not want one party dominating all rostra, all TV channels and all radio stations. We want to give all parties, big and small, the chance to express their opinions through TV and radio, which can reach the *fellah* on his farm and the worker in his factory. Party papers are insufficient.

"I do not agree with banning candidates from canvassing the public and meeting the public in mosques. No! Open all doors and all windows so that the nation can express its opinion without pressure, intimidation or rigging."

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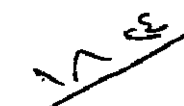
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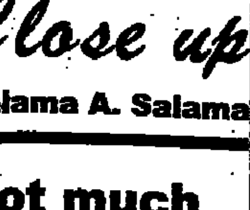
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Close up

Salama A. Salama

Not much gold in the jubilee

This year the UN celebrates its 50th anniversary. The celebration, though, is taking place beneath thick clouds of despondency, at a time when the future of the venerable organisation, formed by the victorious powers at the end of World War II, is shrouded in doubt.

Just as the General Assembly of the United Nations was being convened at the beginning of its 50th year, the UN's role in the world's two most potentially dangerous conflicts was being systematically marginalised. In the ceremonies at the White House for the signing of the agreement expanding Palestinian self-rule — considered by many the point of no return in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict — invitations were sent to most of the international parties that had played, or were expected to play, a role in the settlement. But the two international organisations most intimately connected to the course of the struggle — the UN and the Arab League — were conspicuous by their absence from the list of invitees. They were excluded, despite the fact that it was the UN that afforded Israel its legal status.

The UN has similarly been excluded from playing any significant role in the Bosnian crisis. It was the American blitzkrieg that succeeded in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table. And it is NATO that has assumed responsibility for peacekeeping. There is no place left for Okashi, or for any other representative of the UN secretary-general.

The signs of this shift did not appear overnight. For some time now it has been apparent that the US is at the cutting edge of a campaign to limit the activities of the UN, particularly in the sphere of peacekeeping, an arena in which the organisation has played a positive role for over half a century. Ever since the debacle in Somalia, a disaster for which the US can take a fair share of the blame, Washington has persisted in its refusal to participate in any peacekeeping operation not under its direct control. The US also decided to reduce its financial contributions to the UN, to the extent that it is now the organisation's largest debtor.

Washington's stand receives the support of the Republican majorities in both the Senate and the House. Both have demanded that the US contribution to the UN budget be reduced, demands that encouraged the US secretary of state to announce that Washington would not contribute to any UN activity that ran counter to the direction of the administration's thinking. Britain has pursued a similar policy, aimed at reducing the UN's activities to what is termed "preventive diplomacy".

Certainly the positions adopted by the US and Britain clash with the plans and aspiration sof Dr Boutros Ghali, who had hoped the UN might take advantage of the end of the Cold War and the appearance of a new world order to formulate new ways of overcoming international conflicts.

Questions arise over the possibility of Boutros Ghali remaining secretary-general for a second term, questions that would grow even more pressing if the Security Council were to be expanded to include Japan and Germany among its permanent members. Their inclusion would, after all, be tied to measures to minimise UN bureaucracy and introduce greater accountability. Questions also arise over the reduced roles played by smaller countries and the developing nations of the Third World. These after all, constitute the majority of the UN's membership. Perhaps the organisation is evolving into a two-tier system comprising major powers that govern and dominate and smaller nations that listen and obey.

That would be the beginning of the end.



Soapbox

New directions

Friday 6 October marks the anniversary of the courageous crossing of the Suez Canal, that great, man-made channel of water that divides Africa and Asia. It was on 6 October that the Bar-Lev Line was destroyed.

Egypt's initial success in crossing the canal could not be sustained, not least because of the intervention of a certain superpower on behalf of Israel. Yet the 6th of October is still celebrated, and rightly so, as Armed Forces' Day.

To what extent did the October War influence Egypt's policy directions and alter the strategies for peace in the Middle East?

To achieve stability and prosperity for both Egypt and the Arab region was and is of paramount importance to Egypt. And it is this objective that has consistently dictated the direction of Egypt's post-October War policies across all fields.

Following the October War, Egypt's leadership embarked on a series of wide ranging political, economic and social reforms. They drew on the lessons of recent history, concluding that a democratic system, irrespective of its short-comings, was the only possible way forward, the only means to achieve excellence and accountability.

Those who presided over the victory in war became as bold in the peace process. Reconciliation, negotiation and compromise became the tools by which national objectives were acheived. Realism replaced idealism and pragmatism replaced dogmatism. Cooperation and coexistence became the watchwords, taking the place of conflict and war.

Throughout the 1990s, in the Middle East and in other regions of the world, experience has vindicated the foresight of those who determined Egyptian policy following the 6th of October victory. The lesson had been learned: war cannot solve problems, negotiations are the only way to achieve a permanent peace.



Mohamed Noman Galal

This week's Soapbox speaker is the Egyptian ambassador to Pakistan.

Turning handshakes into hard fact

The euphoria apparent at the signing of the Declaration of Principles two years ago has given way to a more serious recognition of mutual responsibility, writes **James Zogby**

Some things change, some things remain the same. It was impossible to avoid making comparisons between last week's Israeli-Palestinian White House ceremony and the September 1993 Washington signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP).

The days leading up to the 1993 event were filled with expectations: a psychological and emotional breakthrough was occurring, history was being made. This year, on the other hand, found neither the Arab-American nor American Jewish community leaderships expressing enthusiasm at the prospect of yet another White House event.

For many, the hopes raised in 1993 had been dashed during the long and hard years that followed. Continued repression and violence, coupled with the lack of progress in implementing the political aspects of the DOP and economic development, left supporters of peace wanting. Among both Arab-Americans and American Jews, it appeared that the opponents of peace had the upper hand.

Further diminishing enthusiasm was the perception that the most recent negotiations had been too long, too hard-fought and had yielded a product too imperfect to create a workable solution.

Since so few were happy with the results, what was there to celebrate?

While the events of September 1993 left the Arab American and American Jewish leaderships euphoric, September 1995 resulted in a more serious recognition of mutual responsibility. This was, if anything, the central theme projected by Rabin and Arafat in the many speeches they gave during their two days in Washington.

There clearly is a new relationship that has developed among the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. Their handshake and smiles didn't seem forced this time, and neither did their words. Rabin, Arafat and Peres actually spoke about one another with humour and warmth. Rabin even praised his Foreign Minister, Peres, in glowing terms — an act which some in the American Jewish community noted was more indicative of the changing attitudes than the warm words of praise and support he offered to the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat.

Equally telling of this change in attitude were the comments both Rabin and Peres made separately in public events during their two day visit to Washington.

Speaking before a gathering of Jewish leaders, Rabin strongly condemned those who attack the peace process. He chided those in the Jewish community who think that because they give money to Israel, they can dictate its policy. It was the policy of his government to honour and complete this peace process, and if his US Jewish opponents didn't like it they could, he said, "keep their money."

At some point in his remarks Rabin noted that the goal of the peace process was to see Israel living next to "an independent Palestinian state". After a pause, he corrected himself saying that it would be "something less than a state." A number of Jewish leaders who were present noted that Rabin often used the word "state" and during his pause, there was no negative audience reaction. Rabin's "apparent" miscue was no surprise and created no shock — a Palestinian state is an inevitability and most American-Jews know it.

For his part Peres, speaking before a mixed Arab-American and American Jewish audience, also gave new insight into the changing attitude. He spoke of having come to understand the misery that Palestinians had to endure and noted that he has learned in his life that no one has the right to take freedom and independence away from any other people. As he spoke passionately about these feelings, there were whispers in the audience commenting on the Foreign Minister's very personal expression of feeling for Palestinian suffering!

For his part, Arafat worked hard on the day following the Thursday ceremony. He began the day at a Builders for Peace breakfast, urging more investment in the West Bank and Gaza. After a few official meetings, the Palestine National Authority (PNA) president spent a tough hour answering questions from the editorial board of the *Washington Post*. He then attended back-to-back luncheons hosted in his honor in the Senate and the House of Representatives.

He again received tough and pointed questions and gave back tough and pointed answers. Many of the members of Congress who attended were the very same members who only one week earlier were rudely insulting Arafat and calling for an end to US financial support for the PNA. A number of those same congressmen indicated that they had been very impressed by the PNA president's straightforward answers to their questions. The Senate and Congressional sessions both ended with handshakes, photo-ops and commitments to work together to make the process a success — a very different tune from a week ago.

The combined result of the presence of these leaders in Washington, their words, and the White House ritual has been to create among Arab-Americans and American-Jews a new sense of commitment to the peace process. Cynics have become believers — but believers who realize that the success of this process will require hard work.

It is clear that the current arrangement is, at best, a weak compromise. Without US pressure on Israel to give more, the Palestinians got not what they deserved but what they could get.

The most optimistic and realistic way to describe this pact is that it represents neither a half-full nor half-empty cup for Palestinians. Rather, it is the beginning of having a cup at all, and now comes the chance to fill it. Will the land mines that mar the landscape of the accord (e.g. too many settlers, too many checkpoints, too little land and water) explode in the faces of those who are earnestly hoping to make this peace work?

It is not time that will tell — it is the commitment of leadership in both the region and in the US that will shepherd the process through to a successful completion. We left the September 1993 signing with euphoria — but with a passive sense that with the handshake, reality has changed. We left the September 1995 events knowing that reality had not changed. Feelings and some attitudes have changed — but for reality to change, the new relationships and attitudes must be transformed into hard new facts. This will require a mutual investment and commitment to implementing Palestinian rights despite the explosions and protests that are bound to occur.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab-American Institute.

Ahead of his time

Mohamed Mahmoud El-Imam examines the continuing relevance of the ideas propagated by Gamal-Abdel Nasser, who died 25 years ago

That Nasser was a great leader of the Arab homeland is indisputable. It would be useless to contest the assertion that he influenced the course of events not just regionally, but well beyond the perimeters of the Arab World. It is also true that the world has undergone dramatic changes since his death a quarter of a century ago. What I should like to emphasise here, though, is the continuing validity of many of the ideas propagated by Nasser, and in doing so to illustrate how in many ways he was far ahead of his time.

Early in 1953, just a few months after the 23 July Revolution, Nasser said *"we seek not only...industrial or military advances, we want humanity to advance"*. Nasser's statement came some four decades before human development became a catch phrase in the United Nations and its agencies. Nasser often said that the construction of factories was easy, so too the construction of bridges and dams. It is the making of people that is difficult, yet it is the making of people that is essential.

Sufficiency and equity, Nasser's famous motto, was a call to social equity. And his approach to this end is a perfect example of the theory, developed during the seventies by a group of eminent economists working with the encouragement of McNamara, the then president of the International Bank of Research and Development. In the face of the common-wisdom of the times, the group of economists gathered by McNamara asserted that there could be no valid measure of efficiency that does not take account of the social complex. To assess degrees of economic efficiency without taking on board the social dimension, was, they argued, a useless exercise. They concurred with Nasser, some years after the Egyptian president's death, that it is social efficiency that is important rather than a narrowly defined economic equilibrium.

A necessary precondition for the achievement of such ends was the dissolving of class differences. It involved the eradication of poverty, and the causes of poverty, particularly monopoly and exploitation. It involved the provision of equal opportunities and access to gainful employment across the board, as well as the provision of the necessary safety nets. (Nasser is on record as saying that his greatest wish was to provide every Egyptian family with a pension.)

Now if all of this sounds familiar, it is probably because all these issues reappeared at the core of the agenda of the 1995 Copenhagen World Social Summit.

Nasser early recognised that on a regional level, the prospect of unity would be enhanced if different communities could identify common goals. It was a lesson taken on board by the European Community in the '80s, as Europe began to promote the virtues of social cohesion as a necessary prerequisite to further union.

On both levels — the national and the regional — what Nasser understood was the importance of a sense of belonging. This he articulated in one of his favourite stories, the tale of the soldier who deserted the battle field not from cowardice but because he possessed nothing in his country that could possibly be worth fighting for.

Another important plank of the Nasserist experiment was the commitment to a free and open system of education. On 30 June 1954 Nasser made a speech which contained the following:

"We believe in the individual and we believe that the country will not be strong unless the individual is strong. We believe...we are obliged to strengthen the individual...in order to be capable of strengthening the nation. And the basis of such a strengthening must be education."

Access to knowledge, Nasser understood, is the decisive factor in the development of the modern nation. For Nasser, knowledge was the route to true freedom, ignorance the darkest form of servitude. It is only now, in the light of the General Agreement on Tarriff and Trade Uruguay round, that we are coming to understand the true implications of what Nasser had said. When he was born, the world fell into two camps, one peopled by the conquerors, the other, much larger camp filled with the conquered. This division, though, has been replaced by another: the camps now house those nations that know, and those that do not. And power is the prerogative of those that have access to knowledge.

Nasser was always convinced that the freedom necessary for the formation of a democratic society had to be based upon knowledge. He was conscious, at a very early stage, of recently identified "new world variables", including that most buzz-wordy of concepts, globalism. He observed that the world was shrinking, and that developments in communications were opening up opportunities that earlier would have been unimaginable. The rightful and legitimate needs of man have, as a consequence, everywhere increased. Such increases in aspirations though have seldom gone hand in hand with the ability to fulfill the aspirations. Nor is there any other way of meeting such increased expectations without a national mobilisation. Since this demands a certain amount of sacrifice before the take-off stage is reached, such a mobilisation can only, if it is to be successful, be an outpouring of the will of the people.

And here we must return to social equity, one of Nasser's favourite themes. Nasser never embraced autarky, and always remained open to developments in the international arena. He did not bandy about accusations of cultural invasion, believing that the Egyptian people had every right to achieve what other peoples had achieved. It was to this end that he asserted Egyptian independence, to this end that he tirelessly laboured.

This is not to say that such developments exercised an unhealthy fascination over Nasser. His concern remains, from beginning to end, the majority. In rural areas that majority could barely survive, scraping together just enough to survive, to eat, clothe and shelter themselves.

Nasser predated the Latin American development schools and the economists of the International Bank for Research and Development in his insistence on the importance of the "fulfillment of basic needs". And his awareness of the sufferings of the majority often led him to remind intellectuals of the existence of the labourer, toiling in the fields, barely able to eke out a living.

Why did he feel so much for the poor? On the second anniversary of the revolution he was asked, in an interview, about his ideals. He replied: "I think it best always to keep in mind that one should feel what others feel; sense the feelings of the weak and those of the strong, sense the feelings of the poor and those of the rich, and all the time one must weigh and assess the reasons for such feelings. Only in this way can you approach a realisation of justice."

He was never biased to any particular class, or against any given group, at home or abroad. He was fair to all, and hence, found a natural home in the Non-Aligned Movement which he helped to found.

The writer is former minister of planning under Nasser.

To The Editor

Backtrack

Sir- I enjoyed the article "A ride at the top" by Fayza Hassan and Shahira Sami. In the section "Railway blues" Fayza Hassan writes about the building of the tramway at the turn of the century. She mentions an incident described in my book *Assiout, the Saga of an Egyptian Family*, in which I quoted some lines about the naming of the Bulkely and Fleming stations. These lines were given to me by the well-known architect and historian of Alexandrian sites Dr Mohamed Awad, for which I acknowledged and thanked him in my book.

However, it now seems, according to Dr Awad, that they were part of an unpublished paper by Robert Mabro, director of the Oxford Institute of Energy Studies. Robert Mabro gave Mohamed Awad these lines to describe the west side of Bulkely. Apparently Dr Awad was to describe the east side as part of a joint work which was never finished or published.

I have promised Mr Mabro through Dr Awad that I would acknowledge his contribution in any reprint or translation of my book.

I would be much obliged if you could refer to these facts in any future edition of your very interesting newspaper.

Hanna Wissa
Zamalek
Cairo

Only October?

Sir- Once more we celebrate the anniversary of the October War. I do not know why we issue books, show films, discuss and hold meetings just in October about this great war. Many foreign countries have made great films about their role in the world wars. Although these roles were seen as minor they proved that they did a lot.

Atef Ali
Student
Alexandria

Nuclear trespassing

Sir- I read with great interest the artiel by Mariz Tadros entitled "Chirac in kangaroo courts". We all oppose the sudden nuclear testing by French President Chirac who dethroned François Mitterrand in the last presidential elections. The South Pacific Forum, which includes Australia and New Zealand, disagreed strongly with the testing because of the widely known harm it inflicts on both mankind and the environment — two faces of the same coin.

On the other hand, attacking environmental groups is a crime against nature, for these groups are entirely committed to the conservation of the environment. France tries to exploit the South Pacific region's need for aid, in order to completely alleviate the tempest it has stirred up, by emphasising the safety and scientific aspects of the tests and pledging more aid. The international community should have stricter procedures against any nuclear state that tries not merely to carry out nuclear testing but thinks about it. Peoples of the world would like to live in a nuclear-free world. We all call upon nuclear states, as a whole, to abide by the peaceful aspects of the use of nuclear energy. The world's rage over the French transgressions — nuclear testing — is sealed evidence towards these trespasses. Every time the Australian seismological centre detects shock waves in Australia as a result of such nuclear testing, Australia seeks to lead regional rallies in the campaign against Chirac's nuclear testing. This, in my view, is necessary to conserve the environment in which we live.

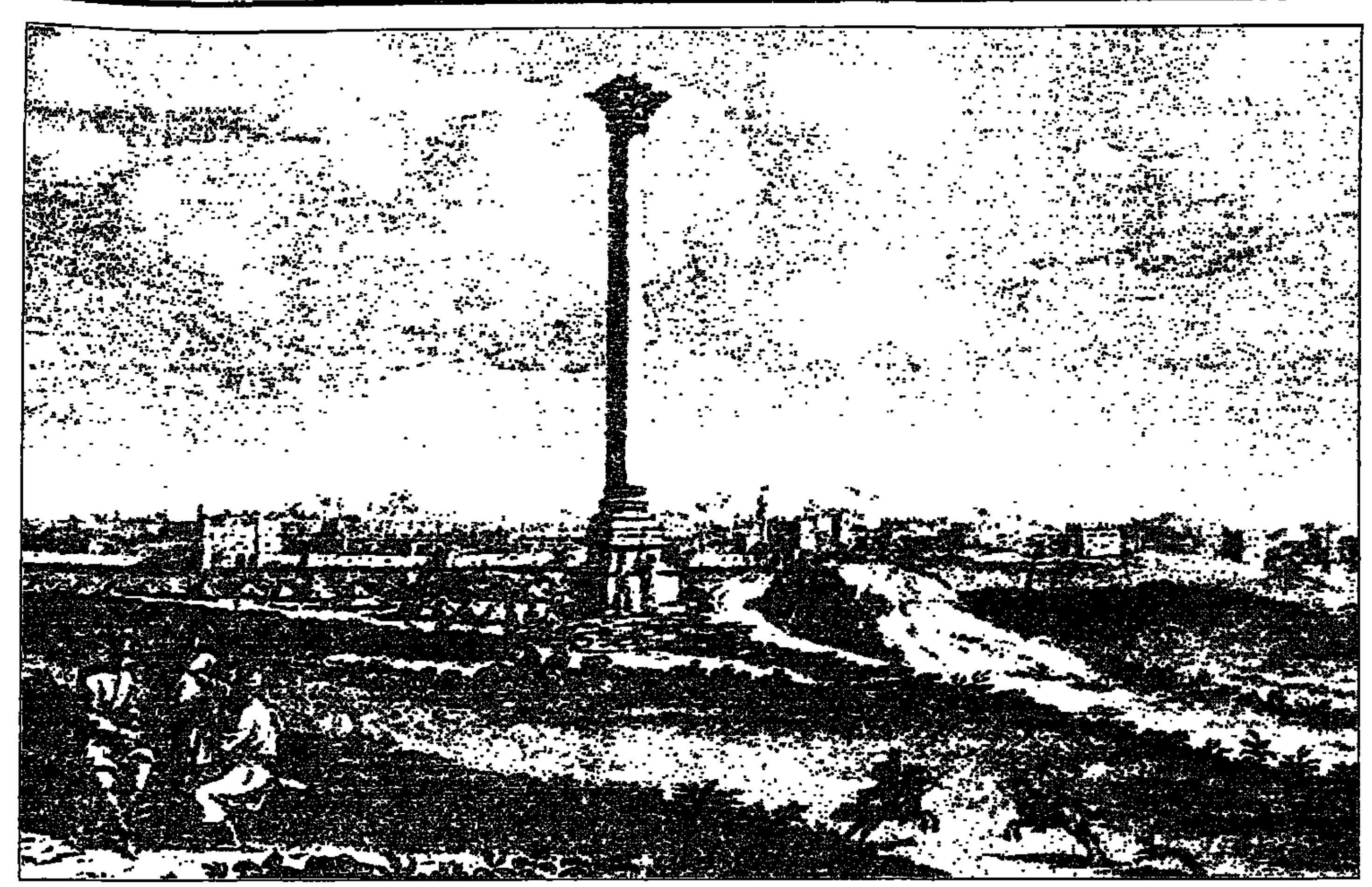
Ashraf Faragallah Saad
English Language Teacher
Maadi

In due honour

Sir- With reference to the profile entitled "Her father's daughter", (issue 240), Gamal Nkrumah stated that "Like father, like daughter" is simply true. He proved himself to be a true journalist when he drew up a "flashback" dealing with Nasser's private life. Showing gratitude towards "Uncle Nasser who was down-to-earth, a man of the people". Being conscious that her father played a dominant role on the world stage, Hoda Abdel-Nasser affirmed that her father "is still alive". No doubt, Nasser's ideas and experiment are part and parcel of people's collective conscience. Commemorating the 25th anniversary of Nasser's death has been coloured with kind feelings towards a man who made his people sing with joy. His greatness is embodied in the appeal he had in the eyes of his people: "How we might survive his absence?" His leadership will remain, forever, as unique because he mingled with his people, sharing with them their hopes and making them achievable.

In brief, the "profile" is the success that shaped history in an emotional form. It is honour where honour is due.

Zarif Kamel Hakim
English Language Teacher
Cairo



A 17th century engraving by Corneille le Brun, a Dutch traveller, included in the exhibition *Alexandria calls Venice*. Besides historical engravings of Alexandria and other memorabilia, collected by Mohamed Awad and bequeathed to the Alexandria Preservation Trust, the show also includes a reconstruction of the award winning Egyptian pavilion from this year's Venice Biennale. For details see Listings

Killer ghosts

David Blake leaps into crevasses and dizzying landslides

Piano Recital: Haig Avakian: Small Hall. Cairo Opera House: 28 September

Piano time comes round again. Pianists from all over, massing at the frontiers, are ready to descend on the Cairo Opera House. They come in all forms — mad, bad, tall and short, square or bizarre, take your pick. It is fun to choose the players, particularly the ones who snipe most at the established classical repertoire.

Of these two early invaders, Haig Avakian is a tough jungle-fighter, but his thrills are authentic pianism. He is on firm not fun ground. He knows what he can do best, so he does it. What he does best is thunder. Some pianists do. John Ogden did. It is not a serious impediment to piano pleasure if the sound is varied in degree. Avakian's touch and tone have marked highs and lows. It is the highs he relishes. It is up to your ear if you can take it: he will never need amplification.

Yet despite thunder cracks and lightening he is good at small things. There is always something happening. His kind of playing is disliked in some quarters — it does not fit in with the well-worn classical mould. He resembles those celebrated pianists of the past who, without moving a muscle or without making any body action at all, could unleash calls of shattering volume.

Opening killer was Tchaikovsky's *sonata in G major, op 37*. Later, the climax of the evening would be Dukas' huge *sonata in E flat minor*, a Frenchman's gift to pianistic overkill.

Tchaikovsky must have been in very square mood when he wrote the op 37. It is as rugged and bumpy as a rugger match, lacking any trace of the Russian salad, of the swoop and swish Tchaikovsky gave to almost all his compositions. Certainly not Slav, it was a drudgery of bang-up sudden breaks and stops, minute melodies and not much else. There are some fairies at the bottom of this sonata, as impish as fireflies at night. But then comes a killer chord sequence to blow the lot out the window. Hard to play and hard to interpret. Not a single mood but a running video of moods, sudden stops, and then off again over the bumps. Avakian showed his stamina by using this long indigestible piece as an opener.

The next two pieces — Tchouhadijian's *Caprice La Lyre Orientale* and Al-Rimali's *Lyrical Pieces* — did not fit the gargantuan mood of the evening. Then the authentic slaughter broke loose. The Small Hall, unused to piano decibels of this kind, positively shuddered. It was the bone crusher coming into action — the awesome *E flat minor sonata* of Paul Dukas. Brave of Avakian to attempt it. It is a painful haul.

This work takes some listening. It certainly received some playing. Avakian has big stops and he pulled them all out. OK Dukas, Avakian seemed to be saying as he rolled up his shirt sleeves, this is it. And we had it full on. As we tossed through the waves of piano roughage came the thought: if only it had been Gershwin.

Dukas was a genius who wrote one career shattering hit, *L'apprenti Sorciere*, which ended in Disneyland with some mouse or other as the apprentice. It hit the top of every chart and in the process sank Dukas as a serious composer. He wrote *Ariane et Barbe Bleu*, an opera of some fascination, and much else of great quality. But the mouse did the trick and down went Dukas.

The sonata displays an almost endless musical fertility. Whatever you are expecting does not come. Its themes are presented, savaged, then tossed aside in the onrush of Dukas' invention. Some sections break into passionate lyricism, but nothing follows anything. The flattening process needs seismic power. This it received from Avakian. It goes on and on almost as long as the century it typifies. Dante not Disney — a musical third circle of Hell. But it has its uses historically and it received from the gallant pianist a more than splendid performance.

He was so good a disturbing thought arose. A challenge supreme awaits Avakian — to perform in Cairo the *Claviercembalisticum* of Khaikrosu Sorabji, the Hindu genius who died, in 1992, aged a hundred, one of the great unsung heroes of 20th century music. It is a killer piece but the reward is glory for those able to ascend its heights.

Masters of the 20th Century: Werner Bartschi. The Majesty of the Alps. Beethoven, Concerto for piano and orchestra in G major, Bela Bartok, Concerto for orchestra: Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Werner Bartschi, piano; Ahmed El-Saedi, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House: 29 September

The Majesty of the Alps is a strange, appealing piece of straightforward visual music. The deep shadow, the dazzle of the sun on snow, approaching tempest, rain, silence as the snowflakes fall and turn into landslides of chaos hurtling down icy surfaces into bedlam — it is all there on the wide screen. As Leni Riefensthal's *White Hell of Pitz Paulo* spreads out before us a dangerous, uninviting spectacle grows. An Alp is not a friend say the notes of Bartschi. And Bartschi's notes are no friend to the listener. It is anything but straight going.

The opening is almost the best part. Pedal notes of peculiarity, deep, awful and awesome, move along. Above this Bartschi colours an orange sound far, far up and away, like a mystic chorus of human ghosts. It is frightening, conjuring a huge arc of something planetary, extra-terrestrial, inhabited by sounds and wrapped in colour. An Alp is more than a rock. In this music it is a veil of terror.

What Bartschi offers as a pianist was in some ways related to the extra-terrestrial effects of his composition. The Beethoven is virtuoso music. It needs dazzle, speed and song. Bartschi played it this way. He never once plunged into the deeps with it and so there were no rich eruptions of sound. It was almost the *No 1 concerto*, harking back to the 18th century.

He is a well-mannered pianist in an area which is becoming increasingly vulgarised. He has respect for both Beethoven and the instrument. His timing of trills and expositions, as they end in those nasty, rarely achieved final chords, were perfect to hear.

But all this was on the surface. No 4 is more than a beautiful, icy bauble. The way Bartschi played it reflected but did not exude its warmth. An inclination to connect passages with a feathery tone hardly compensates for the lack of genuine emotion. It might do for Liszt, not for Beethoven. The heart was his metronome.

The 20th century moves towards its close, leaving Bartok in as equivocal a position as ever. He never had the common touch that unites the really great composers. Bartok never belonged. He was a moon, a reflected thing, a loner. So be it, he said, and passed away leaving his haunting and shattering revelations to bewilder and tease.

In all of Bartok's works there comes a moment when it seems the curtain will be torn apart. It never is. This concerto was a bid for closer contact with a public he never had. It fails. It is grand and awe-inspiring, but the Magyar and czardas rhythms which lurk forever behind it never flash out. Bartok teases but refuses the descent to musical soap opera. Like a prestigious mandarin, he went to his death.

All these things harassed the mind during the wonderful performance given by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra. The orchestra was fine and sharp, the sounds full of mystery and colour. It is a difficult work, but El-Saedi's allowed the music to speak for itself, which was exemplary.

Theatre

The whirl's the thing

In *Al-Mawlaweya*, at Al-Ghouri Palace, **Nehad Selaiha** finds too much singing and not enough whirls

One afternoon last month, while CIFET was in full swing, I bumped into Ezzeddin Al-Madani, the Tunisian dramatist, in the lobby of the Cairo Sheraton. He told me excitedly that he was on his way to, of all places, Damanhour to watch a production of his play *Al-Hallaj* (the famous Muslim mystic). Two days later, I heard that another guest of the festival, the Spanish playwright Alfonso Sastre, had been whisked away in a car to Mansoura and had come back with a glowing report about a production of his play *Escuadra Hacia La Muerte* (The Condemned Squad). It restored his faith in Egyptian theatre, he had said.

In both cases, the host was the recently founded Al-Ghad (Tomorrow) theatrical troupe which, single-handed, was holding what looked like a mini festival in the provinces. The company is the brain child of Abdel-Ghaffar Ouda, the head of the Popular Arts Sector of the Ministry of Culture, who, ever since the dismantling (for political reasons) of his small, state-funded *mutagawwel* (touring) theatre in the 80s, had dreamt of a young experimental touring troupe. After three years of planning and building, fund-hunting and trying out possible managers, he has finally managed it. The new company's base and permanent home, an annexe of the Balloon, is nearly finished and will open later this month. The troupe, however, under the diligent management of Dr Hussein Abdel-Gadir, has not waited for the new building to launch itself in to the world. After nearly eight months of hard work, they were ready with five productions ranging from Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Sastre's *Squad* to Medani's *Al-Hallaj* and Mahmoud Diab's *A Land Where Flowers Don't Grow*. For a whole month, these have been touring the Delta, playing alternately at five different centres. They are back in Cairo now where they will play at the new building and alternately tour the different popular quarters of the city before setting off on a tour of Upper Egypt.

For their debut in the capital, Al-Ghad troupe have chosen *Al-Mawlaweya* which opened at Al-Ghouri Cultural Palace on Sunday. Ouda was there, beaming like a good giant and nearly bursting with excitement. It was enough to disarm most rigorous of critics and I am not sure that my enjoyment of the evening was not largely due to his benign presence and child-like joy.

The title of the play refers to the disciples of the 13th century Islamic mystic Jalaleddin Al-Rumi, known in the West as the whirling dervishes. Al-Rumi, the greatest sufi poet in the Persian language, was called *Mawlana* (in Persian *Mevlana*: 'our master'); hence, *Al-Mawlaweya*, the followers of *Mawlana*. The text, by the young and prolific Sayed Mohamed Ali, was based on the life and writing of the great sufi, particularly his didactic epic *Masnavi* (Spiritual Couplets), and was intended partly as an explanation of the order, its rituals, symbols, beliefs, and initiation rites, and partly as a drama centering on the conflict between Al-Rumi and his family and entourage over his intimate, spiritual relationship with the wandering dervish Shamseddin Al-Tabrizi. The relationship (platonic love?) ended in tragedy when one night, in 1247, the holy Shams disappeared forever. It has recently been established that he was indeed murdered, not without the knowledge of Al-Rumi's sons, who hurriedly buried him close to a well that is still extant in Kenya. The experience of love, longing and loss, as one historian tells us, turned Al-Rumi into a poet.

What we saw at Al-Ghouri, however, according to the playwright, was an extremely adumbrated and mangled version of the text. To make room for singers Ahmed El-Kahlawi and Zeinab Younis, director Gamal El-Sheikh sacrificed many episodes and scenes without bothering to forge new links. This resulted in many loose ends, startling shifts and abrupt transitions. Drama, song and ritual seemed to be at each other's throat all the time and the result was total confusion. After an over long opening sequence, representing the initiation of a novice into the fraternity in the present, we are jolted back in time to the first meeting between Al-Rumi and Al-Tabrizi; but no sooner do we begin to get involved in the drama (despite the many musical interruptions) than we are frustrated by the auditorium lights coming up to announce an interval. We expect the second part to take up the story where the first left off. But no; this would be logical, and if there is one thing this show seemed deliberately to shun, it was logic. We never get to know what becomes of Al-Rumi's son's vow to take revenge on Al-Tabrizi for having seduced his father and married the girl he coveted. In fact, both the son and Al-Tabrizi are never seen or heard of again. Instead, we get a dramatisation of one of Al-Rumi's parables on physical and spiritual love, with a new set of characters, and with Al-Rumi himself (played by the director in a highly declamatory style) standing at a lectern in one corner at the back and intermittently reading out of a huge volume. More disconcerting still, at random intervals, the young male dancers would barge in on the action, invade the arena and start whirling and occasionally swaying from side to side. Whenever a character fell prey to suffering or conflicting emotions, singers Younis and El-Kahlawi, always close at hand, came promptly to their assistance and put their feelings into song. As if the actors' declamations weren't enough. Indeed, the acting in this show was generally so exaggerated that it seemed like parody. Sometimes, this was useful, particularly when Al-Rumi is made to declaim pompously that 'ignorance is better than any knowledge that does not liberate a person from involvement in the world', or something to this effect. In a more convincing voice, such words, which echo one of the most cherished precepts of some Islamic fundamentalists, would sound shocking. As it was, nobody took them or their sayer seriously.

The dramatic muddle, the rambling structure and the clear lack of focus in this show are readily explained by the clumsy cutting and stitching operation performed by the director on the text. What is not readily understandable, however, is the extreme visual poverty of the show, despite a generous budget, or the many inaccuracies in the costumes of the fraternity members. It is not as if the author had not researched his material painstakingly before hand: he even procured from Turkey a video tape of a documentary film on the sect and showed it to the director and his crew. Still, it is not too late to put things to rights. *Al-Mawlaweya* is shortly due to move to Al-Tekeiya, the historical home of the sect in Cairo (near the Citadel) for which it was originally designed. The site itself is bound to improve the show immensely; and if the director takes some trouble over the costumes, the movement and ties some loose ends here and there, the improvement would be doubled.



Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Rainer Irrgang & Erhard Wehrmann
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 5 Oct.
The human figure is the main subject of Irrgang's drawings and paintings. Whermann, whose photographic theme is the artist at work, teamed up with Irrgang, one of the few sculptors who cut their own marble, and has been photo-documenting his work since 1981.

Egypt Mother of All Countries
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. 11-21 Oct.
Illustrated postcards of the Egypt of yesteryear by Joseph Lichtenstern and David Harari, who ran a postcard shop in Moski in the early years of this century.

Mamdouh Soleiman
Al-Shomou' Gallery, 12 Rd 150, Al-Horreya Sq, Maadi. Tel 350 0081. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 5 Oct.
Abstract paintings with hints of hieroglyphic and calligraphic influences.

Fuentes de la Memoria (Fountains of the Memory)
Spanish Cultural Centre, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 5 Oct.
Photography exhibition comprising works from the beginning of the century until the end of the Spanish Civil War (1900-1930).

Egypt Through the Lenses of Milan Zemina
Ewart Gallery, Al-Sheikh Rihan St, Tahrir Sq. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 8am-8pm. Until 12 Oct.
Photos from the archeological sites excavated by the Czech Archeological Mission, including the Pyramid of Abu Seir, by field photographer Zemina.

Assem Sharaf
Espace, 1 Al-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 12 Oct.
Residually figurative watercolours.

Working with Natural Materials
Faculty of Applied Arts, Helwan University. Tel 713 312/718 856. Until 23 Oct.
Works by German sculptor Marlies Poss.

Alexandria calls Venice
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Sun, 10am-1pm & 5pm-7pm. 10-23 Oct.
Engravings, paintings and photographs collected by Mohamed Awad alongside Gamal Bakri's award winning work at this year's Venice Biennale.

Video Visions Cairo
Al-Hanager Arts Centre, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 30 Oct.
Installations and video works.

Egypt Mother of All Countries

Passage to Eternity
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, corner of Al-Sheikh Rihan and Mansour Sts. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 8am-8pm. Until 31 Oct.
Exhibition on Egyptian funerary customs and beliefs shown in books, photos and plans.

Future Fossils
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 778 623. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. 8 Oct-2 Nov.
Objects of an eclectic nature, including dolls, rope and chess boards combined by Mohamed Abla to exemplify evolution.

Gamal El-Sagini (paintings and sculptures)
Extra, 3 Al-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. 10 Oct-4 Nov.

Hungarian Roots of Photography
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St, Tahrir Sq. Tel 357 5422/3/4. Daily 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 9 Nov.
An exhibition of photographs from the collection of the Hungarian National Museum for Photography, 1914-1945.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4.30pm, Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4.30pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm, Fri 9am-11am, 1pm-4pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab Al-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm, Fri 9am-11.30am, 1.30pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

Mohamed Nagi Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.

FILMS

Cinemas change their programmes on Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Three Undelivered Letters
Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr Al-Aini St, Garden City. Tel 355 3962/3/4. 5 Oct, 6pm. Arabic subtitles.
Directed by Yoshitaro Nomura (1979). In this 130-minute film, Robert, a Japanese-American, comes to stay with his uncle Karasawa to study in Japan. Noriko, one of the three girls of the family, marries Fujimura. Robert discovers three letters addressed to Fujimura's sister about the death of his wife. The sister dies and investigations start.

La Strada (The Road)
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8723. 8 Oct, 7pm.
The first of the Federico Fellini series, the film is a must-see classic produced in 1954.

Spanish Films
Spanish Cultural Centre, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962
Mama Cumple Cien Anos (Mother's 100th Birthday)
Produced in 1979 and directed by Carlos Saura. *10 Oct, 7.30pm.*
Mi General (My General)
Produced in 1987 and directed by Jaime de Arminan. *11 Oct, 7.30pm.*

No More Mr Nice Guy
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877/5779479. 10 Oct, 6.30pm. English subtitles.
A 1993 German comedy directed by Detlev Buck.

Emra'a Hazzat 'Arsh Misr (The Woman Who Shook Egypt's Throne)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Starring Nadia El-Guindi, Farouk El-Fishawi and Mahmoud Hemeida.

Tuyur Al-Thalam (Birds of the Dark)
Diana Palace, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Starring Adel Imam, Youssra and Gamil Rateb and directed by Sherif Arafa.

'Atabet Al-Settat (The Women's Threshold)
Rivoli I, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Starring Nabila Ebeid.

Ehna Awlad Elnaharda (We Are Today's Children)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 824. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Athar El-Hakim, Aida Riad and Medhat Saleh.

The Mask
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Jim Carrey finds an ancient mask which turns him into a green faced cartoon-type character.

House of Wax (In 3-D)
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Police Academy III
Odeon, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Street Fighter & Sareq Al-Farah (Kill Joy)
Normandy (outdoor), 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 7pm.
Double feature starting with the English film, which is shown once more after the Arabic one.

Outbreak
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St. Tel 360 6081/348 8600/700. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & midnight.
Starring Dustin Hoffman and David Sutherland in a film that will make you really worried when in public. A virus that needs only eight hours to kill is slowly sweeping across the country.

Disclosure
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm.
Starring Michael Douglas and Demi Moore in a film that portrays real competition in the real world.

Power Rangers
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Teenagers overcome the evil witch and save the world from destruction.

Interview With a Vampire
Karim I, as above. Thur & Sat midnight screening.
Based on Anne Rice's best-selling novel and starring Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt.

Clear and Present Danger
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Starring Harrison Ford.

MUSIC

Military Band
5 Oct, 4pm: Abbassiya Sq.
6 Oct, 10am: Tahrir Sq.
7 Oct, 10am: Merryland, Roxy
7 Oct, 4pm: International Garden, Nasr City.
The 80 members of this band, which gained much recognition in this year's Edinburgh festival, commemorate the 22nd anniversary of the October War.

Lippi Boem Duo (Flute and Harp)
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598/341 2926. 9 Oct, 8pm
Performing works by Bach, Ravel, Zangelmi, Rota, and Sciarrino.

Chamber Quartet
Spanish Cultural Centre, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746/337 1962. 9 Oct, 8pm.
A repertoire of Spanish music from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

European Community Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 342 0598/341 2926. 10 Oct, 8pm.
Performing works by Purcell, Grieg, Delius and Bartok.

Festival of the Nile
Ewart Hall, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 11 Oct, 8pm.
In Cairo's first Chamber Music Festival are performed works by Chopin, Krisler, Puccini, Faivo, Liszt and many others.

DANCE

Indian Performance
Ewart Hall, American University in Cairo, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. 11 Oct, 8pm.
India's first dancer, Kiran Segal dances to live Indian music.

THEATRE

Dastoor Ya Sladna (With Your Permission, Masters)
Al-Fann, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily 9.30pm exc Mon.
Play by Mahmoud El-Toukhi, directed by Galal El-Sharkawy and starring Ahmed Bedeir and Nermine El-Fiqi.

Hazz Nawa'em (Nawa'em's Luck)
Al-Houssaper, 16 Al-Ter'a Al-Boulaqeya St. Tel 769 233. Daily 10pm, exc Tues.
Directed by Roziq El-Bahnassawoui, starring Dalal Abdel-Aziz, Mahmoud El-Guindi and So'ad Nasr.

Al-Za'im (The Leader)
Al-Haram, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon & Fri 8pm.
Starring Adel Imam in a play scripted by Farouk Sabri.

Al-Gamila wal Wehshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)
Al-Zamalek, 13 Shagaret Al-Dor, Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily 10.30pm, exc Fri 8.30pm.
Starring Laila Elwi as the *gamila* and everyone else as the *wehshin*.

Mama America
Qasr Al-Nil, Qasr Al-Nil St, Tahrir. Tel 575 0761. Daily exc Tues, 10pm. Mon 8pm
Mohamed Sobhi, lead actor and director, in a socio-political allegory written by Mahdi Youssef.

Louly
Balloon, Corniche Al-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily exc Tues. 9pm.
Musical performance starring Fayza Kamal, Mohamed El-Helw and Mohamed Nouh.

Ya Nas Efhamou (Try to Understand, People)
Floating Theatre, Fatma Rushdi St. Tel 363 8783. Daily 9.30pm.
Starring Emad Rashad, Dina Abdallah and Hassan Kami.

Ra's Al-Diouk (Cockerel Dances)
Miami, Talaat Harb St. Tel 767 086. Daily 10pm, exc Tues.
Starring Nagah El-Mougi with Mohamed Abul-Hassan and Aida Riad.

Bahloul fi Istambul (Bahloul in Istanbul)
Hilton Ramsis, Corniche Al-Nil. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm, Sun 8pm.
Samir Ghanem stars with Elham Shahine in yet another delirious, hilarious comedy.

La...Balash Keda (None of That)
Al-Rihani, Emadeddin. Tel 591 3697. Daily exc Wed 10pm. Tues 8.30pm
Starring Poussi, Mamdouh Abdel-Alim and Hanan El-Torki.

Hazzemni Ya
Al-Gezira, Abdel-Aziz Al-Seoud, Manial. Tel 364 4160. Daily 10pm, Fri 8pm.
A musical involving extensive belly-dancing by star Fifi Abdou, Medhat Saleh and Sherif Mounir; and many, many musical sketches.

National Circus
Next to Balloon Theatre, Al-Nil St, Corniche Al-Nil, Al-Agouza. Tel 347 0612. Daily, exc Wed, 9pm.
With jugglers, trapeze artists and finally lions and tigers.

LECTURES

Gods or Demons? The Cults of Hippopotami and Crocodiles in Ancient Egypt
British Council, 192 Al-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319/345 3281. 5 Oct, 7pm.
Lecture by Penelope Wilson, Department of Antiquities at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



Group exhibition, Beheira

BEHEIRA's Culture Palace hosts a group show comprising works by 24 young artists which explore a variety of media and subjects. Paintings and photographs hang alongside mixed-media installations in an exhibition illustrating the diversity of current artistic production beyond the capital.

The Circular Gallery, attached to the Plastic Artists' Syndicate, is given over to the work of three artists. **Ragab Abdel-Fattah** shows 23 batiks, pastoral landscapes all; **Ahmed Said** exhibits clay sculptures, caricatures of the great and good, while **Ibrahim Abbas** shows decorated clay vessels.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***

On his 60th birthday

By Ibrahim Shukrallah

Ibrahim Shukrallah, who died last week, spent much of his working life in the Arab League. He was, though, both a poet and translator, producing *Images from the Arab World*, which he co-translated, and *Mawaqif Al-'ashq wa Al-Hawan wa Tuyur Al-Bahr*, the collection from which the poem below is taken

Life passes
and in its wake —
primordial matter and image,
intimacy and hatred,
Cartesian doubt,
the mysticism of the murdered,
the desire for wandering,
love, faith and the homeland,
all that should have happened and did not,
all that happened and slipped between my trembling fingers;
now I do not live
save in the cells of my body, its organs and fluids.
What is this swelling tumour in my armpit,
the rattling cough in my chest,
the groans to which my body shakes
while I sleep?

I should like to wash myself clean of the weight of depression
but there is no *water*
(water does not reach the third floor);
so I shave,
shy away from the mirror,
prepare myself for going out
but stay in for the rest of the day.

I do not sleep well these days,
turn the pages of a book,
get bored by the emptiness of bald wisdom and convoluted words,
light a cigarette
and terrified by the agonies of cancer
stub it out
and silence the anxieties of illusions
with a sleeping pill.

I wake up early these days
bathed in sweat and shuddering with fear
to find myself still in my silly bed
between decrepit walls
and tell myself firmly
I must have my medical tests today
and give up smoking.
Then I nod off and almost catch sight of
the formula and the decoration
and the meaning of the melody.

But both melody and meaning have narrowed,
the season of love is gone
and the heart longs for new colours of deception,
sniffs out the smell of sea water,
departing ships
and the laughter of girls
behind trees.

The evenings of the past assume dignity when remembered—
banquets exuding fragrance and splendour,
lines of poetry which soar above the clouds of smoke,
circle the rims of wine-glasses,
catch the strangest of similes, serve the noble phrase
and sing of passion and of the beautiful one with brown eyes.

While the insides squirm from the ulcers of disgust
and the skulls' spindles spin,
there is tearing to pieces by dogs in concentration camps,
flocking to the doorsteps of rulers
and the humiliation of eulogising their pettiest of victories.

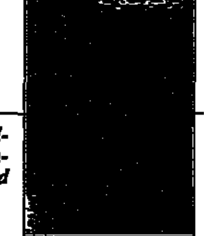
Who is he who knows that the joyful greeting
is that of a farewell
and who remembers those who parted without a farewell?

When Schubert's 7th rises—
allegro and andante—
the extremities of my youth heal
in the strength and sweetness of the anarchic storm.
The notes of the second movement begin
telling of beauty here and there,
all the movements flow into the main theme
and the finale rises to the last climax
of the joining of life and death.

Then I remember the sweet smell of her hair, the *glow of her closing eyes*
and an embrace that held all lovers' embraces,
the blessing of the years and their terror:
then the light gently stirs my lame existence
and the cymbals clap in my veins
and the pulse dances.

This is the last cigarette
This is the last cigarette.

Feb. 1981



From Mawaqif Al-'ashq wa Al-Hawan wa Tuyur Al-Bahr (Stations for love, indignity and seabirds), Cairo 1982.

Birth pangs of a paradigm

Al-Aidiologia Al-'Arabia Al-Mu'asira (Contemporary Arab Ideology), Abdullah El-'Arawi, *Casablanca and Beirut: Al-Markaz Al-Thaqafi Al-'Arabi, 1995*

Long after it first appeared, Abdallah El-'Arawi has revised the Arabic translation of his French text, correcting the many flagrant mistakes that had rendered the original translation virtually meaningless. And in the introduction to the new edition, El-'Arawi reviews the critical reception accorded the first Arabic edition, suggesting that many erroneous readings were propagated due to mistranslations, a symptom, he argues, of a broader phenomenon. The author stresses the dangers inherent in bad translation believing that for any country to reject the methodological and intellectual trends set by Europe and imposed on the rest of the world over the past four centuries is a potentially perilous exercise. The translation and transposition of Western thought and its interpretation touches upon the fundamentals of Arab thought and behaviour, begging questions concerning the modernisation of Arab thought.

In the introduction El-'Arawi poses several questions: Has the Arab reality of the 1990s progressed beyond the portrait of the 1960s contained in his book? What is the impact of the fall of Soviet communism, or of the waning of pan-Arabism; or the rise of Islamic fundamentalism on the concepts contained in the volume?

The very title may appear to set an agenda, containing the word "ideology", a word that many have pronounced obsolete. But of the many definitions of the word, which one operates in El-'Arawi's book? Certainly the term is not used to signify false consciousness, or to dignify a distorted reflection of current reality. Nor does he employ the word to demarcate an intellectual framework, a consistent formalism intended to dissimulate a reality hard to comprehend and analyse. Rather the author uses the word to signify a theory that is not inherent in a given society but which has been appropriated from another and is in the process of becoming part of the fabric of that society. El-'Arawi's ideology, then, is a paradigm about to be born.

There are three main currents within contemporary Arab ideology: the first, which might conveniently be represented by the sheikh, foregrounds the relationship between creation and God. The second trend is represented by the liberal politician who would characterise the current decline as the result of tyranny and slavery, and who believes salvation will come with parliamentary representation and individual freedoms. The third trend, represented by the technocrat, believes that the dominance of the West lies in applied sciences and technology.

The sheikh, the liberal political leader and the technocrat embody the three phases through which Arab consciousness has passed since the last century as it has attempted to grapple with its own identity while simultaneously grappling with the identity of the West. In the course of the volume what becomes evident is that the author derives his threefold paradigm from the works of three Egyptian figures: Mohamed Abdou is the sheikh, Lutfi El-Sayyed the liberal politician and Salama Moussa the technocrat.

These paradigms of consciousness succeed one another: the consciousness of the sheikh is concomitant with a society subjugated to colonialism; the consciousness of the liberal politician is closely associated with the new bourgeoisie while the technocrat parallels the rise of the national state and the ascendancy of the petit bourgeoisie. These paradigms are consecutive though by no means discrete. The consciousness of the sheikh evolves, acquiring a new significance and a new role as it is exposed to change. The various forms of consciousness converge and coexist. But the sheikh, the liberal politician and the technocrat do provide different answers to one essential question: What is it that constitutes the positive distinction of the West and by extension, what distinguishes Arab society?

The sheikh would posit that it is religious belief: the liberal politician political organisation, the technocrat technology. El-'Arami, arguing that a specific image of the West is latent in the consciousness of each, concludes that Arab-Islamic identity is defined against what is both pronounced and muted in these images.

Consciousness of the self becomes an excavation of the many phases through which Western consciousness has passed. For the sheikh there is a harmony between religious principles and the pragmatic, liberal values of the West, since religious principles are intrinsic to human nature, regardless of time or place. The democratic liberal philosopher, in all his writings, confines himself to a reiteration of the ideas current in developed countries, without seeking to critique such ideas. The same applies *to the technocrat, who looks for guidance* to H G Wells and Bernard Shaw. However, the image of the West in its various phases, as reflected in the different forms of consciousness of Arab thinkers, diverges from reality in its movement and totality. It is an image that labours under distortions, becoming an ideological image in the pejorative sense of the term — i.e. a false consciousness.

Despite the fact that the author emphasises the existence of a genuine relationship between different consciousnesses represented by the sheikh, the liberal leader and technocrat and the respective social strata associated with them (the traditional elite, the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie, respectively), he considers it an indirect relationship, essentially external to the Arab world. Yet each of the three figures excavates the past of Western consciousness: Mohamed Abdou emulates Martin Luther; Lutfi El-Sayed Montesquieu and Salama Moussa Herbert Spencer.

It is this aspect of the book which provoked the most strident criticism, particularly from Mahmoud El-Alem in "Consciousness and False-Consciousness in Contemporary Arab Thought". The influence asserted by Western civilisation on Arab ideology, as reported by El-'Arawi, appears mechanical and operates in a single direction, failing to take into consideration the defining elements in internal social structures, ignoring the complexities of cultural impact. The trends and stances of Arab ideology, if a fruit of direct European influences, could not, after all, have taken root had Arab society not proved a fertile breeding ground.

Many would criticise the author, saying that any reduction of Arab consciousness to three paradigms is an excessive simplification, imposing on that consciousness a malaise from which it would be difficult to recuperate. It also implies a reactive, claustrophobic nature. The issue, then, becomes no longer a study of contemporary Arab ideology but an exposé of distorted translations of fragments of the history of Western thought.

The author, though, escapes such reductionism by allowing for the meeting of his three paradigms of consciousness. The sheikh, in defending the unity of the nation, assumes that capitalism leads to a society lacking internal coherence and calls for a species of social justice *that flirts with socialist concepts and* Marxist jargon. The liberal politician, following Marxist readings of capitalism, eulogises its liberating effect on the individual and the freedom of opinion it allows. The evolution of capitalism is, after all, an essential step in leftist thought, and one that cannot be bypassed. Thus, the liberal thinker flirts with leftist concepts. Nor does the technocrat shy away from leftist thought; indeed, he constantly calls for planning and concerted labour.

This inclination towards the intellectual left is not an adoption of Marxism but the result of an objective need for an ideology that provides a summing-up of the modern history of the West within a perspective simple enough to be employed by the sheikh, the politician and the technocrat. (Hence the local leftist offshoot, a home-made, tamed version that has nothing to do with Marx.) It is a manufactured system of thought playing the same role Aristotelian philosophy played in older Arab thought. The three trends agree on the rejection of exploitation, discrimination and backwardness, courting simplistic, forced forms of leftist ideology, incorporating them within their own conceptual framework, then disavowing the left as they promote the indivisibility of their own systems of thought.

In the '60s El-'Arawi asserted that, regardless of their philosophical and moral implications, private property, free enterprise and competition were inextricably interwoven with the process of modernisation. He stated very clearly that such principles are the quintessence of modernity and should be appropriated. Social and intellectual modernisation, he argued, can only be achieved through a profound understanding of them. In the introduction to the latest edition of his book, he prides himself on having predicted the collapse of Eastern Europe, as well as the shift, in progressive Arab countries, towards privatisation.

The assimilation of the liberal concept — in the sense of supporting and following up on democratic achievements — and then going beyond that concept may not, as El-'Arawi apparently believes, have anything to do with the monopoly of crooks, bandits and ex-bureaucrats over the chaos of production. But then nor does the current situation of Eastern Europe provide a model for modernisation.

Reviewed by ***Ibrahim Fathi***

Plain Talk

This is not an obituary, though I have just lost a friend. Rather, these are memories of that friend, "recollected in tranquility".

I knew Ibrahim Shukrallah for nigh on half a century. Our friendship started at the English Section, Faculty of Arts, Fouad I (now Cairo) University. He was a couple of years my senior, but we were united by our love of poetry and music. We both wrote poetry, entering the section's competition for the sonnet. And we were both members *of the gramophone* society.

We both started our careers as journalists. During the second World War he was the editor of *Tripoli*, an Arabic newspaper covering North Africa. That was during the Desert Campaign, while I was working as head of the Arabic Division of the British Ministry of Information. We were both great believers in democracy and opposed to dictatorship, hence our participation in the allies' media campaign.

Ibrahim Shukrallah never gave up his literary activities. He was the first of our generation to embark upon the noble task of presenting the Arab world to the West. As a recent graduate from the university he published, in collaboration with our lecturer Herbert Howarth, *Images from the Arab World*, published in 1944 with a *subtitle* "Fragments of Arab Literature Translated and Paraphrased with Variations and Comments." It is a commonplace now to assert that each generation must translate for itself. And at the time, theirs was the ideal form of interpreting *a literature* into a foreign language. It was not a literal translation but a literary endeavour that read with a remarkable fluidity.

During the Second World War Cairo was astir with literary activities. Cultural clubs were active all over the city: *Music for All, the* Anglo-Egyptian Union, the Victory Club, the American University and the British Council organised extensive programmes of cultural activities.

Like other intellectuals of our generation, we had mixed feelings about the British. In *Ibrahim's own words: "the* anti-British movement which demanded complete independence for Egypt, including the liquidation of British military bases was at its height. Like many of my generation I found myself a part of this movement. Yet I also found myself attracted to the company of British intelligentsia."

Images From The Arab World was the product of a process in which both partners gave way a good deal to one another in the course of writing: the result, the authors note in their introduction, "is a mixture or overlap of incompatibilities with an effective fusion of aspirations".

One side of Shukrallah which very few knew was his great ability as a simultaneous translator. When he retired from the Arab League, after more than three decades of distinguished representation of the league in various capitals of the world, it was not simply the end of a successful career, but the beginning of another, equally successful. Shukrallah was involved in the organisation of international conferences, where his long professional experience in translation was invaluable. His voice, coming over the microphone, became a familiar feature of a great many international venues. With Shukrallah this new career was in a way more of an infatuation than a job. He was ready to travel thousands *of miles in* pursuit of work he loved.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

From censorship to enlightenment

Mahmoud El-Wardani rounds up the best of last month's new titles

■ ***Ounshouda Lil-Kathafa*** **(Hymn to Intensity), Edwar El-Kharrat, Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, *1995***

In the preface to this volume novelist Edwar El-Kharrat expresses reservations over whether the essays contained within could accurately be described as either literary theory or criticism. He prefers to describe them as reflections, confessions, questionings and, above all, stresses that they are intended to act as an invitation to the reader to partake in such activities.

The volume contains essays written over a long period of time: a 1969 essay tackles issues arising from ambiguity and clarity in artistic expression, a later essay takes on the function of literature, particularly the novel, today. In between El-Kharrat addresses questions *of cultural* authenticity, national identity, the Arab components in his own writings, oppression and freedom, individuality, normalisation with Israel, in the process providing insights into his own artistic credo.

■ ***Farouk: Bidaya Wa Nihaya*** **(Farouk: the Beginning and the End), Mohamed Ouda, Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1995**

Political analyst and Nasserite author Mohamed Ouda provides a painstaking biography of King Farouk, from his birth to his departure from Egypt on board Al-Mahrousa, the royal yacht. Ouda chronicles the changing social and political scene from the reign of King Fouad to the abdication of his son. The second World War, and the fluctuating fortunes of Egypt's political parties provide the backdrop for a tale that includes momentous events — the defeat of *Palestine in 1948*, the Cairo fire of 1952 and the subsequent revolution.

■ ***Al-Cinema Al-Missriya 1994*** **(Egyptian Cinema, 1994), ed Ali Abu Shadi, Cairo: Al-Hay'a Al-'Aama Li Qussour Al-Thaqafa, 1995**

This critical guide to Egyptian cinema over the past year, including essays and reviews by 20 film critics, was first published in 1994. Among the critics whose work is anthologised here are Rafiq El-Sabban, Mustafa Darwish, Ali Abu-Shadi, Samir Farid, Kamal Ramzi, Ahmed Saleh, Ahmed Youssef, Khairia El-Bishlawi and *Raouf* Tewfiq.

■ ***Al-Nazaria Al-Adabia Al-Mu'asira*** **(*A Reader's Guide To Contemporary Literary Theory*), Raman Selden, tr Gaber Asfour, Cairo: Al-Hai'a Al-'Aama Li-Qissour Al-Thaqafa, 1995**

Raman Selden's *A Reader's Guide To Contemporary Literary Theory* was first published in 1985. It is a didactic volume that seeks to classify contemporary literary theory for the layman, providing an overview *of Russian Formalism, Structuralism* and Post-Structuralism, Marxist and Feminist Criticism and Reception Theory. But as the translator, Dr Gaber Asfour, confirms, the book remains a guide, its function primarily to facilitate further, more in-depth reading.

■ ***Ma'raqa Bayn Al-Dawla Wa Al-Muthaqafeen*** **(The Battle Between the State and the Intelligentsia), Fathi Ghanem, Cairo: Akhbar Al-Yawm, 1995**

Fathi Ghanem is best-known as a novelist, the author of *Al-Ragul Allazi Faqada Zilahu* (The Man Who lost His Shadow), *Zaynab Wa Al-'Arsh* (Zaynab and the Throne), *Hikayat Tour* (The Story of Tour) and *Nabt Min Shubra* (A Sprout from Shubra). In his most recent work, Ghanem draws on his own experience in journalism. In the 1960s and '70s Ghanem held a number of positions that brought him close to the centres of decision-making: he was at one time or another chairman of the board of the Middle East News Agency (MENA), editor-in-chief of *Al-Gomhouria* newspaper and of *Rose El-Youssef* magazine. In his latest book Ghanem broaches a number of confrontations between the *state and intelligentsia*, including the attempts to clip the wings of Egyptian intellectuals prior to 1967 and Ghanem's own experience with television censorship over the filming of his novel *Afiyal* (Elephants), which analysed the difference between censorship under Nasser and Sadat.

■ ***Ikhwa Waheedoun*** **(Solitary Brothers), Mahmoud Al-Rimawi, Amman: Dar Azmena, 1995**

To those acquainted with the work of Palestinian short story writer Mahmoud Al-Rimawi his most recent collection may seem to constitute a departure from his usual mode. Here, he parts with realism and gives full vent to experimentation in an attempt to find new ways of posing familiar questions.

■ ***Al-'Aql Wa Al-Tanweer Fi Al-Fikr Al-Arabi Al-Mu'assir*** **(Rationality and Enlightenment in Contemporary Arab Thought), Atef El-Iraqi, Cairo: Al-Mua'ssassa Al-Gami'ia Lil-Dirassat Wa Al-Nashr, 1995**



Atef El-Iraqi's most recent book traces the roots of Arab enlightenment discourse to Ibn Rushd, analyses various enlightenment issues, Orientalist movements and the question of secularism in contemporary Arab thought. The author devotes several chapters to discussing the contribution of such enlightenment heroes as Mohamed Abdou, Abdel-Rahman El-Kawakbi, Qassim Amin, Mustafa Abdel-Razik, Ahmed Amin, Youssef Karam, Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed, Taha Hussein, Gamal Hemdan, Father Georges Qanawati, Youssef Idris and Naguib Mahfouz. Though the individual sections of this book were written over a long period of time they are united by El-Iraqi's consistent, critical and analytical inquiry into the figures and discourse of enlightenment.

■ **(The Caliphate and Power of the Nation), tr Abdel-Ghani Suni Bey, Cairo: Dar El-Nahr, 1995**

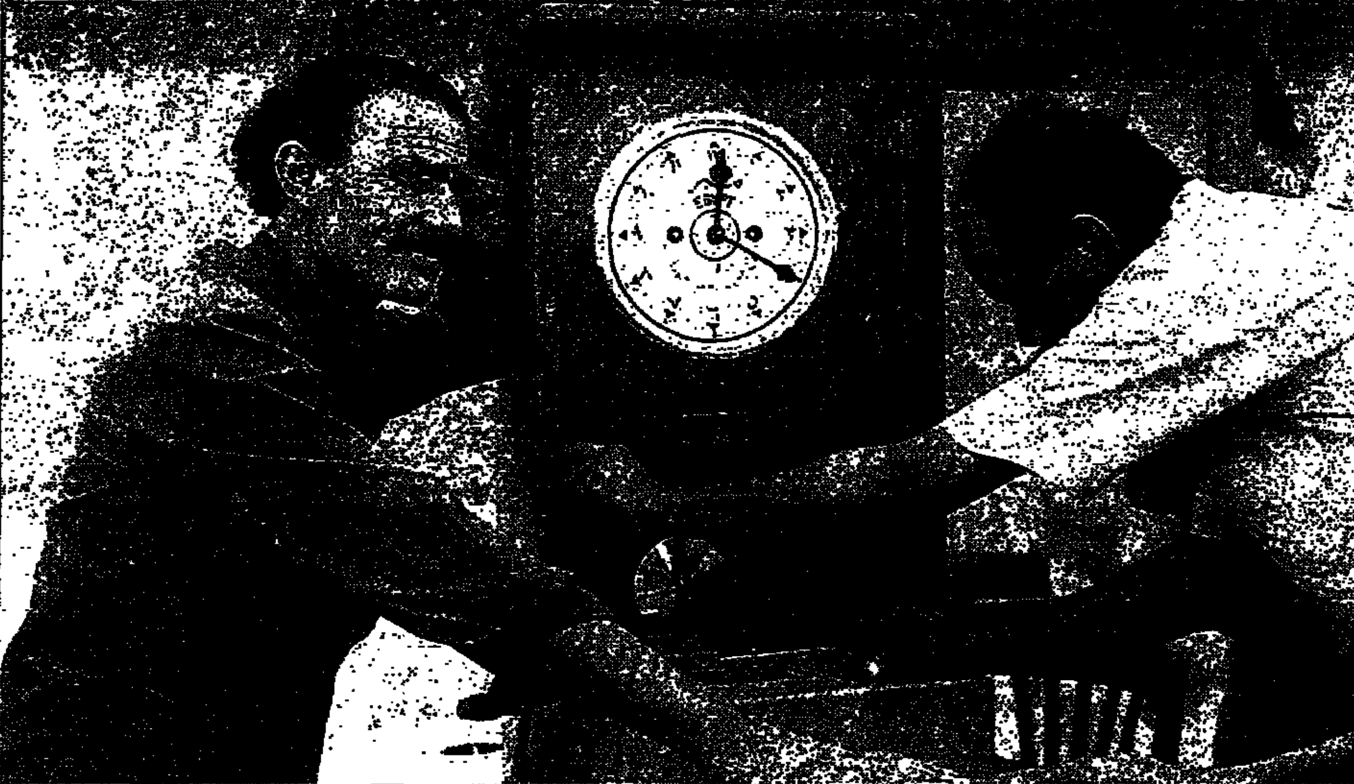
First published in 1924, Al-Khilafa Wa Sultat Al-Umma was translated from Turkish by Abdel-Ghani Suni Bey. The book's importance derives from its contention that it is legitimate to separate the "caliphate" and "power". The legitimacy of this contention is illustrated by an analysis of the political and secular dimensions of the caliphate throughout history.

The current edition is prefaced by a lengthy introduction (almost half the size of the text itself) by Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid. Here he discusses the issue of the caliphate from both the religious and the secular points of view. This is followed by the text of the lecture given by Sheikh Ali Abdel-Razek at the American University in Cairo in March 1932. Finally, the text of the book itself is in two sections. The first section enumerates and analyses the prerequisites of the caliphate, the responsibilities it entails, and its objects. In the second section, the author expounds on the restrictions to be placed on the caliphate and on the necessity of dividing power between it and the nation.

Off the beaten track

At the flea market **Fayza Hassan** discovers a world where the most humble household objects are given a second lease of life and meets an artist who firmly believes in the virtues of recycling, and who creates sometimes amusing objects from odds and ends picked there





No need to pay a mint for a good sink...or an original clock that is often a rare collector's item

photos: Gihan Ammar

The realm of the rag

The rag trade has always attracted buyers and sellers, treasure hunters and amateurs of good deals. Flea markets are popular the world over and some are quite famous. It has always been rumoured that collectors' *items can be fallen upon by chance and, for the traders.* fortunes made.

The story is now famous of the Italian rag vendor who pushed his cart around the streets of Rome calling for *roba vecchia* (old rags). Over the years he bought and sold so wisely that he could afford to [illegible] important sums to the Roman nobility against [illegible] of art. With the princes, dukes and barons de[illegible] was soon th[illegible] owner of an invaluable [illegible]n. Preferring h[illegible] art, he sold it to buy [illegible] a princely title. His descendants [illegible] now authentic princes who have their wise ancestor to thank for their station in life.

On a less regal note, the "roba becchia" vendors of souk Imam Al-Shafei are not doing too badly themselves. "Some of the older dealers have antique shops now in town," confides Ashraf, who only deals in old books. "But they stay in close contact with the place." Ashraf is young but reasonable. "I don't buy what I know nothing about, even if it is cheap. If I think the object is a good buy, I get the advice of my elders." Surprisingly, although the dealers are very knowledgeable, objects are not very expensive. "We need a quick turn-over," explains an older vendor. "We do not have *storage room nor a large capital to work with.*"

Starting Wednesday afternoon, they come from all parts of Cairo, with donkey or horse-drawn carts, sometimes a small truck, and spill their ware into the dusty alleys around the cemetery. The atmosphere is that of a market, with buses and cars weaving their way around — and sometimes over — the displays, and one is surprised to see a hearse pulling up in front of a little gate *every now and then. Plaques affixed to the walls confirm* that this is indeed a cemetery but the children running in and out of the burial grounds make it difficult to believe in the proximity of the dead.

Besides, the activities engaged in just outside belong more to the domain of resuscitation and transmutation. Anything at all that has found its way into a garbage can, having admittedly outlived its usefulness, reappears here vested with a brand new mission. Old instant coffee jars are sold in bulk for glass recycling or by the piece for pickling and jam making, old bottles become candle holders, an old topless garden table in*spires the do-it-yourself home decorator, an empty per*fume bottle is raised to the rank of collector's item. Even old shoes are resoled, painted, varnished and occupy their rightful place as perfectly serviceable, in a display, together with miscellaneous objects ranging from obsolete Coca Cola and beer bottles to back issues of popular magazines and instruction manuals on how to use your first computer.

The haggling is intense but dignified; rarely is a voice raised above the traffic din. Some prices are set, established by precedent, others are open to discussion. The older members keep an eye open to ensure fair treatment.

Should you appear regularly at the Al-Shafei market, soon your name — and purchasing style — will become known to every vendor in the area. "Don't insist, he doesn't buy," or "let her have it, she buys a lot" are pieces of advice that the vendors exchange constantly without losing their sense of humour.

"This is a good market," Ashraf says proudly. "Peo*ple from embassies come here, and we have our art*ists." This is perfectly true. Many foreigners can be seen on Thursdays foraging through piles of what in ordinary circumstances they would quickly throw away, to come out with a chipped cup, a strange looking bottle, a contorted piece of wrought iron. The fact that they may have discarded the same object as worthless not long ago does not matter in the least. Now that they have "discovered" it, it has a totally different value.

The merchants are well aware of this and display anything and everything, the more the better. Beds without springs and springs without beds, frames of armchairs, *bits of swings retrieved from an out-of-business amuse*ment park, toys by the tonne in various states of disrepair — one vendor had a complete collection of miniature cars — bicycles without wheels, wheels without bicycles, shredded tires, used pencils, crayons, half-full notebooks and useless official reports are only a few of the items offered to connoisseurs.

Someone's discarded diary, English, German, Italian and Russian tutorials peep out from under a mountain of used panty hose, while better-off merchants set up rickety tables on which they display trendy sun glasses, watches, grandfather clocks — some of them quite valuable — cash register machines and manual typewriters, none of them in working condition. If you happen to fancy the table, it, too, is for sale.

This, however, is not a place where one can go with a set purchase in mind. Everything is there but not all the time. Serious flea market shoppers make it a weekly tradition. Professionals are there all the time as it is one of the best markets for tools and spare parts, especially *for old appliances. Ancient vacuum cleaners stand in* orderly rows, beckoning to the housewife who has lost or damaged any part of her out-of-date but cherished appliance. All models are represented and so are stoves, with or without door.

In the book department Emily Bronte and Charles Dickens win first place but one can hope to find an out-of-print novel or a lonely encyclopedia volume that mysteriously found its way into a "roba becchia" cart one day. More precious — and more expensive — are the old petrol lamps, coffee grinders and cigarette boxes. Not expensive enough, however, not to tempt you to *start a collection. Meanwhile the inhabitants of the area* go about their business as usual. The displays, which amateur collectors pore over in the hope of a find, are an opportunity for the poor to buy necessities at half the price. They do not pause to exclaim in admiration over this or that trinket. They buy old plastic bottles or second-hand clothes. Antique dealers see the market in terms of potential; sanded down and refinished, that table will be transformed, its function given over to aesthetic appeal. But for the average shopper at the Imam Al-Shafei market, the point is usually the object itself. By re-using a bottle or a piece of scrap iron, they inject other people's throwaways with new usefulness. Even objects designed to be disposed of are recycled; when one is forced to cut corners the *souk* is a means of survival. When one has a chic interior it is a treasure trove.

Where imagination takes over

Home owners who can afford at all to decorate their homes come in different categories: those with mon*ey and no taste, those with money and taste and those* with taste and little money. While the former would do well to acquire the services of a professional decorator and leave it completely up to him, it is for the latter that Ayman El-Ezabawi has created his gallery.

Looking like an apartment in the process of being redecorated, this first floor gallery has a little garden in which El-Ezabawi keeps his finds in need of serious attention as well as a couple of statues which a friend of his has sculpted *in situ*. El-Ezabawi sells some furniture, just a few pieces, and photographs, pottery, cushions, old books, mirrors, a bit of this and *a bit of that, not unlike many of those who bridge the* gap between the serious antique shop and the second-hand dealer. But El-Ezabawi himself is different. He has time to listen to ideas, improve on them or just add a "professional" touch. He does not deal in heavy antiques, nor in very valuable objects. What he has cannot be categorised, nor taken very seriously. If a category must be found it could be said that he deals in amusing objects, the ones you fall in love with at once. El-Ezabawi himself has a good sense *of humour and a welcoming manner. His "collec*tion", arranged in devil-may-care fashion, winks at you as soon as you walk in. The nice thing is that the pieces will keep winking after you have taken them home, unlike certain trinkets that take your fancy in a shop but lose their charm as soon as they change environment. This is because El-Ezabawi and his partner Hani El-Borai don't do much in the way of exhibiting things in the best possible manner. Pele-mele is more like it and not in a particularly artistic way. So what you see is what you get. How does El-Ezabawi buy? He is not very secretive about *his sources: Alexandria, the Sa'id,* old houses whose heirs want to get rid of grandmother's "junk", flea markets... the usual. Young painters and photographers have a prominent presence, but if he finds old ancestors' portraits to buy, then why not?

Ayman El-Ezabawi was never trained professionally, except for a two-year bout at the Faculty of Fine Art, so don't talk styles and wonder what you should put next to your Art Deco fruit dish. He mixes and matches according to his whim and if it pleases his eye then it is fine. About the way his life as a collector started, he recounts that as a child he used to pass by the late Tewfik Sioufi's antique shop on Qasr Al-Nil street and stop to admire the objects through the window. One day a particular painting caught his attention and he tried to go every day just to look at it for a few minutes. Mr Sioufi noticed him. "Why don't you buy it?" asked Sioufi. "I am a student, I don't have this kind of money," said El-Azabawi, surprised at the suggestion. "But you do not know the price," argued Sioufi. Even to the inexperienced young boy, the price quoted seemed low. Still it was too much. "Tell you what," said Sioufi. "Take the painting and pay me a little whenever you can." El-Ezabawi dutifully paid his "instalments" and there and then decided on his life vocation. El-Ezabawi's best asset is his inventiveness and the way he deals with what he finds. Bits of wrought-iron gates become coffee tables or, if too small, they will be used for making smaller side tables; old doors picked up on demolition sites are used for doors of elegant hi-fi cabinet units, once stripped and stained in unusual reds and greens; heads of columns, rough chunks of marble support thick glass slabs for a different look.

Talking to El-Ezabawi is a reminder that house furnishing and decorating should be fun activities to be taken care of at leisure, more like a life-time hobby. Which immediately brings to mind the harrowing experience all modern young couples go through, who want a completely furnished house before they begin their marital life. Dragged by mothers and sometimes mothers-in-law and older sisters as well, to the various shops in town advertising "everything for the bride and groom", young brides are pressed to choose every single item they will ever need in a lifetime, down to their dinner dishes, pots and pans, before they even learn about their real needs. They rely on parents to tell them what they will like, depriving themselves of the pleasure of discovering one by one the many little knick-knacks, or even the important pieces, which will give their home its unique style.

Pot pourri

For love or money

My friend and colleague was poring over the *Guardian*. What attracted her attention was a survey about the nature of relationships among British couples. "We should cover something like that," she decided. "But all is so hush hush," I objected. "Do you know about it?" she asked pointedly. And indeed I did. In a land where what is good for the gander may be lethal for the goose, men boast and women whisper but it all comes out in the end.

Hisham was bragging the other day about his wife and his *urfi* wife, who both work for the same company. Disappointed by our lack of response — coming from Paris he had hoped to shock us, the country bumpkins — he insisted: "Everybody in France has a wife and a girlfriend." This was no great revelation, in Paris or elsewhere, but I felt sorry for the guy, who looked crestfallen. "Is your wife jealous?" I forced myself to ask. "No," he was prompt to answer, taking heart. "She knows that she will always be number one." "She must control the finances," murmured someone behind his back. "How about your *urfi* wife," I asked quickly, hoping to drown out this uncharitable remark. "She knew what she was getting herself into," he said self-righteously. "I never lie."

But did his *urfi* wife believe him? Or, like Hala, did she imagine that she would eventually manage to overpower number one? Hala is the daughter of a friend. She always refused the prospective suitors paraded before her by her family. She wanted to have her own choice. She fell in love with one of her professors, married with children, who was yearning for his carefree days. Hala, basking in her youth, never thought for a minute that the wife would be any match. Soon they were only meeting to discuss his impending divorce. Meanwhile, she had to keep the relationship a secret. He offered an *urfi* marriage "for her own protection, and to prove *his sincerity*". But Hala could not settle for so little when she wanted so much.

At the end of the school year the professor took his family on holiday. On his return he appeared reticent. Finally Hala put her foot down. "We can't get married just now," he blurted out. "My wife is going to have a baby any time... and the apartment is in her name," he added, as an afterthought.

Hala is trying to pick up the pieces of her life and is concentrating on her studies. "What hurts most is that she won," she confides. Relationships are for older women, she *thinks*. "The young cannot handle the heartache," she says. Now she wants to get married and have her own man, all to herself.

Safi, an older women, could tell Hala a thing or two. *Divorced, with a successful career, she has no time for the joys of the hearth, dashing constantly to the world's four corners. Her urfi* marriage with Raouf suited her fine. He sometimes needed her financial help, but that was all right. Raouf had wanted to marry her — without moving in, because his mother would not have approved — and longed for an official paper to consecrate their union. Safi never saw the point. But she was quite surprised — and hurt — when Raouf announced that he had become engaged to his cousin and was going to marry soon. "It pleases my mother," he explained "and marriage is good for me socially." Somehow he thought that it would legitimise his relationship with Safi. After all, he pointed out, all his friends were married to more than one wife. "Nothing will change for us, you will see," he said lightly. But change it did. Safi sent him off to concentrate full-time on his social schemes and flew to Europe. A man of her own was not a necessity. Which brings me to the point. Relationships — here and elsewhere — are more often based on economic, social and personal needs than on a desire for companionship, understanding and human warmth. That we choose to hypocritically robe our consumeristic instincts in sentiments is only proof of our increased sophistication. When our natural yearning for companionship, understanding *and human warmth has become totally absorbed* by our need for ownership and we have in turn successfully managed to disguise this need as a yearning for companionship, understanding and human warmth, we will have finally reached the apex of civilised relationships.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Macaroni with shrimps in sauce

Ingredients:

1/2 kilo macaroni
1/2 kilo cooked shrimps (unshelled)
1/2 kilo tomatoes (peeled and diced)
1/4 kilo green pepper (diced)
2 large onions (coarsely diced)
1 tbsp. tomato paste
1 cube vegetable stock (spicy)
Salt + pepper + allspice
2 tbsps. lemon juice
a pinch of oregano
corn oil

Method:

Cook the macaroni (preferably shell-shaped) in boiling water. Strain under cold running water and set aside. Season the shrimps and set aside. Fry the onions in oil until golden then add the green pepper and stir. Pour over the diced tomatoes, tomato paste, cube stock. Season and simmer until all ingredients cook. Add the shrimps to the sauce and stir, then add the oregano. Allow to cook in the sauce for 10 minutes only. In another cooking pan, put the boiled macaroni and season with some salt. Add the shrimps and sauce stirring under medium heat. When all ingredients blend and come to boil, cover and simmer under low heat for 5 minutes. Serve hot with green salad and beet roots.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Turkish delights

Cecilia Robertson finds a hotel which hides within its shiny, interior, a restaurant of unexpected merit

I love the Pyramisa Hotel. It's just so gloriously out of place. It should be in Riyadh or Miami, but there it is in Giza refusing to be self conscious or apologetic. It's like a woman in a blue rinse and twin set turning up at yoga classes for vegans and cheerfully standing on her head.

You'll recognise the Pyramisa by the row of palm trees outside strangled in plastic tubes of coloured lights like the Snake Man in the Coney Island freak show. Inside, it has a Starship Enterprise feel, with acres of marble and tubular metal in greys and browns and whites. Everything is smooth and shiny, and sounds bounce around like rubber balls.

The night I was there it was almost empty except for a few children in flimsy party dresses with frills on their ankle socks skidding up and down the corridors, and women with waxen faces and black crescent eyebrows staring into shop windows.

It didn't, truth be told, promise much on the culinary front, but *having struck up an affinity* with the palm trees, I was not to be deterred. Good thing too, for the Topkapi Turkish Restaurant on the first floor defies the laws of probabilities, providing excellent food and service in a perfectly amenable setting, entirely removed from the bright, disinfected world beyond its doors.

The restaurant is kitted out like a converted Turkish bath planted in the middle of an Ottoman sitting room. No odalisques, but a sunken grey marble area overhung by a chandelier of magnificent proportions suspended from a low ceiling padded with rich, damask upholstery.

The tables are well spaced and few just as the menu is concise but choice. There is nothing over ambitious about the Topkapi. It confines itself to doing one thing well, albeit on a small scale, and thus succeeds where bolder restaurants fail.

You have two options. Either rein yourself in while ordering starters to leave room for the other courses, or indulge yourself to the hilt right from the beginning and expect to only sample the main dishes.

However, it would be a shame — not to mention extremely difficult — to stint on the appetizers which are superb. From the Mediterranean soup with red lentils, rice and hot spices to the courgette fritters, this is food which simultanously teases and satisfies the palate, combining different textures and tastes so that one hungers for more even as the stomach fills.

Those which stood out were the *pathcan kizartmasi* (pan fried eggplant slices with garlic and yoghurt sauce) for LE6, and *boerek* (turnovers stuffed with minced meat and vegetables, deep fried and served with what the menu terms 'refreshing' sauces) for LE6.50.

The eggplants were slippery and slimy in that fried eggplanty way that leaves the flavour of the vegetable intact, and came with a yoghurt sauce which lifted the dish onto a plane of melting, tingling deliciousness rarely experienced. The *boerek* was equally good and generously served, although they *resembled spring rolls more than a turnovers.*

Exhilarated by the first round, we awaited the main meals with enthusiasm, expecting equal culinary inspiration. From a number of ragouts, risottos and meat skewers we chose lamb risotto in folio pastry and Chicken Topkapi — a dish of chicken breast stuffed with cheese and pistachio.

Both were good, but the risotto was too heavy to handle after a filling first course and was not "baked in folio pastry" as the menu promised, but rather came served on a half-hearted base of pastry pieces which seemed to have been inserted as an after thought. I enjoyed the chicken and its nutty filling but wished it hadn't been swathed in a bland but distracting sauce.

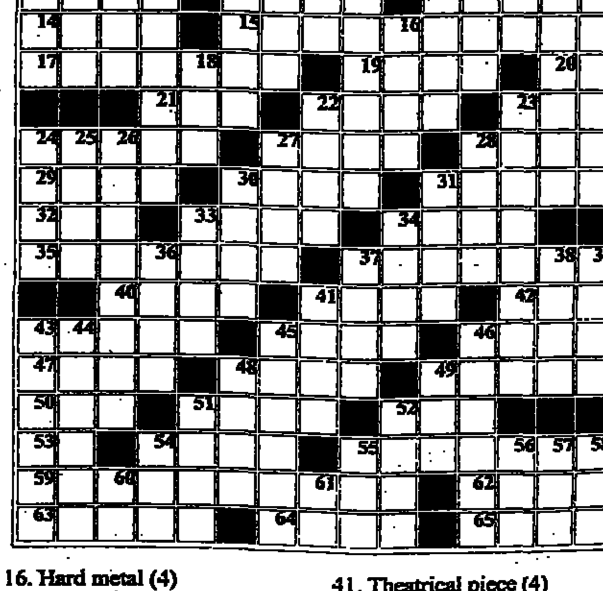
We finished up with a *baklava* which was too soggy and nutless to be memorable, and paid about LE50 per person, before emerging once again, replete and satisfied, into the shiny world of the Pyramisa.

Topkapi, Pyramisa Hotel, 60 Giza Street, Giza. Tel: 336 7000/8000/9000.

Al-Ahram Weekly

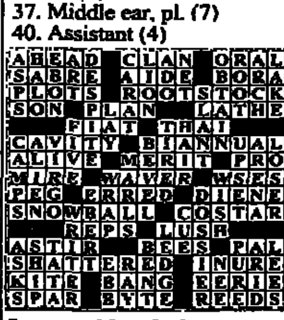
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



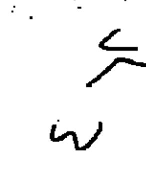
Across
1. Squash (4)
5. Legend (4)
9. Trial (5)
14. Oratorio (4)
15. Foresight; karma (10)
17. Deform (7)
19. Remarque's Christian name (4)
20. Initials of Mr. Eliot (2)
21. Attempt (3)
22. Nasal discharge (4)
23. Humour (3)
24. Outing; frolic (5)
27. Initial; token (4)
28. Plunge (4)
29. Excursion (4)
30. finished (4)
31. Searing ray (5)
32. Limb (3)
33. thick clumsy piece (4)
34. Amusement (4)
35. Adorning with precious stones (7)
37. Middle ear, pl. (7)
40. Assistant (4)
41. Cylinder, reed (4)
42. Depression in mountain-lake (3)
43. Brass instrument (5)
45. Spanish cheers (4)
46. Lineage (4)
47. To the shelter side (4)
48. Bring up (4)
49. Senses (5)
50. Pronoun (3)
51. Corporality (4)
52. Comparative for "y" (3)
53. Chinese unit of distance (2)
54. If not (4)
55. Aloof (7)
59. Putting to work (10)
62. Wood wind instrument (4)
63. Torrefy (5)
64. Part of A.D. (4)
65. Incision (4)

Down
1. With 4 Down, character in Alice in Wonderland (3)
2. Onasis' pet name (3)
3. Female relative, abb. (3)
4. See 1 Down (6)
5. Energetic; frisky (4)
6. Talent; ready skill (5)
7. Depart (2)
8. Exact satisfaction for (6)
9. Entrance to mine (4)
10. Describing a type of wine (3)
11. Weather initials (2)
12. On the go (6)
13. Comb., form for "that is last past" (6)
16. Hard metal (4)
18. A Scandinavian coin (3)
22. Gravitate (4)
23. Smart aleck (8)
24. Male deer (4)
25. Contemplate; orifice (4)
26. Ransacks (8)
27. Lullaby (4)
28. Humid (4)
30. Mound (4)
31. Limping (4)
33. Conceal (4)
34. Swindles; Cambridge College servants (4)
36. 1.6 kilometer (4)
37. Row (4)
38. Xmas in carols (4)
39. Meads (4)
41. Theatrical piece (4)
43. Utensil for scooping water out of boat (6)
44. Of last month (6)
45. Swelling (6)
46. Fear and trembling (6)
48. Cheerful (4)
49. Nourished (3)
51. Smudge; obscure (4)
52. Prep. of motion or direction (4)
54. Elevated trains (3)
55. Caravanserai (3)
56. Lincoln's pet name (3)
57. Gained (3)
58. Seine (3)
60. Ma's mate (2)
61. Printer's measure (2)



Last week's solution











photos: Sami Boshra & Saleh Ibrahim

The song remains the same



Top: Chilean Luis Jara sings his way to the international contest's grand prize; Egyptian Ahmed Ibrahim, first prize of the Arabic contest in hand, joins the other prize-winners; husband and wife duo Beatrice and Patrik Dali from Italy, winners of the international competition's first prize. Bottom: The winners — voices from across the globe

Inas Hamam and **Rania Khallaf** strained to the sounds of last week's First Cairo International Song Festival

The closing ceremony of the first Cairo International Song Festival last Friday marked the end of the week-long event which, considering the fact that it was the first of its kind to be held in Egypt, was not lacking in enthusiastic supporters. "It's about time Egypt had an international song festival to add to the film, TV series and theatre festivals we already have," said veteran Egyptian singer and actress Hoda Sultan. Although the festival may have been similar in concept to the annual Eurovision Song contest held by member-countries of the European Union, its aims were somewhat different. "We simply intend to promote tourism in Egypt", said Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui. "The idea of encouraging tourism and conventional business was reinforced when the Cairo population conference was held. Its success promoted the idea of the international song festival" commented Fawzy Abdel-Maksoud, president of the festival. It therefore came as no surprise to discover that as far as the song festival organisers were concerned, the end — increased tourism — definitely justified the means by which this would be achieved. Although Egypt does have a deeply-rooted love for art and culture, it was apparent that what it didn't have was the experience to hold such a festival.

Twenty foreign and nine Arab countries participated in the contest, with over half of the entries from Arab countries. Two competitions were held simultaneously, one international, and one Arabic, with a separate orchestra for each. With songs from Egypt and Morocco entered into the international competition by the 'artistic committee', the basis on which songs were entered, selected and assigned into either section was rather unclear. Lora Abess, from Lebanon, who works as a professor at the National Supreme Music Institute, won third prize in the international competition. She said that although she felt lucky that her song was chosen to represent Lebanon in the festival, it was, in fact, a mixture of both traditional Arabic and Western music. Mohamed Mustafa, a member of the festival's Superior Committee and secretary of the Arabic Committee clarified to *Al-Ahram Weekly* a few days after the festival's closing ceremony that the deciding factor as to which competition a song was entered into was based primarily on the beat, or rhythm of the song, as well as the musical instruments used. "Certain instruments can only be used for Arabic music. Also, some entrants specifically stated which competition they preferred to enter their song into".

Conditions did, however, specify that all songs' lyrics and music had to be original, unedited and previously unreleased on radio, television or recorded in any country in the world. One spectator, Sherif El-Shafie', commented that although the festival gave him a chance to listen to different music styles, he felt that the Arab singers who participated in the festival had been chosen at random. "Moreover, we were not given any information about the entrants' careers or even a history of the different types of music." Sherif also pointed out that most of the famous singers who were supposed to participate in the festival did not show up at the actual event.

In an attempt to combine the new with the old, the organisers had scheduled daily black and white musical film shows and seminars throughout the festival, hosted by a wide range of singers, actors and actresses, film directors and advertisers. In addition, four renowned Egyptian artists were honoured at the closing ceremony for their life-long dedication to music — Sayed Darwish, *Umm* Kalthoum, Baligh Hamdi and Mohamed Abdel-Wahab.

Mohamed El-Gazaar, a student attending the festival, felt that "more importance should have been placed on organising the lectures and seminars, with emphasis on the unique characteristics of Arabic music." Another spectator also felt that the festival could have been better organised, and that the seminars should have been used to discuss specific and crucial subjects such as methods of developing and upgrading the Arabic song.

"There were mistakes as far as organisation goes" admits Mohamed Mustafa. "But it must be remembered that this is the first time such a festival was held in Egypt. Until now, mistakes are being made at the Cannes Film Festival, and at the International Cairo Film Festival which has been going on for ten years."

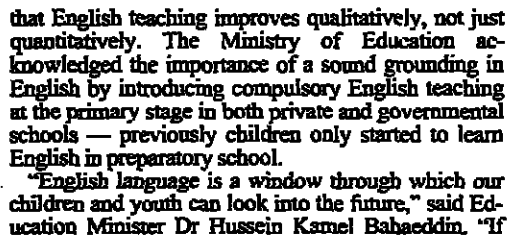
But despite organisational setbacks the festival brought together for the first time in Egypt a large number of Arab, Egyptian and foreign personalities in the music industry. Lebanese singer Magda Al-Roumi, made a well-received guest appearance on the final night of the festival, not to sing, but to praise both the country and the people, referring to the festival as an expression of a "new art in a new era". Tunisian singer Lutfi Boshnaq gave a highly impressive performance at the opening ceremony, as did Iraqi singer Kazem Al-Saher, in Egypt for the first time on a professional level, at the closing ceremony. Fortunately for him, his songs at the closing ceremony were accompanied by an orchestra, something which a selection of the winning entrants, who had to mime to the poor quality playback of their recorded songs, could have only prayed for. South African singer Mara Lou, during her colourful and entertaining rendition of traditional and modern African songs, asked for the turning up of the volume of the music to which she was singing live, to no avail.

If anything, the festival provided an opportunity for new foreign and Arab talents to come together and learn from each other. A spectator from Morocco, Farida, felt the festival should have been held a long time ago. "The most positive result of the festival is that it created competition among Arab and foreign singers. Having listened to a number of Arab and international songs during the festival, I had developed an idea of how we could develop the Arabic song to bring it up to an international level." Winner of the international competition's grand prize Luis Jara from Chile had previously participated in many international song festivals, and has so far recorded 5 CDs. He said that this was the first time he had participated in an Arab festival. "I hope it won't be the last time. The festival gave me a unique opportunity to get to know the traditions and culture of Egypt and its people through its songs. It is very important for Arab and foreign singers to compete, convene and listen to each others' music." Although this is one of the very few times Jara has heard Egyptian music, he finds it very interesting. "I find it very sexy", he said. "I am married to an Arab woman whose parents are Palestinians, so I have always found it very interesting, especially its rhythms." At the closing ceremony, Jara dedicated his award to all his friends and participants in the festival.

Abul Gaith Al-Aiady from Tunisia also took part in the official competition. This was his second visit to Egypt — last year he participated in Cairo's first International Television Festival. Although he sees the benefits of East and West coming together at the festival, he feels that certain limits still need to be imposed. "The main aim of the festival is to restore dignity to the Arabic song since most of the Arab singers tend to imitate Western styles. Even in Tunisia, which has long been famous for the preservation of its unique musical heritage, there is a growing tendency among singers to adopt the new style of music." He suggested that in future, the festival should include music recitals on Oriental instruments such as the *canoon*, tambourine and violin in order to preserve the unique heritage of Arabic music.

English for all

Teaching English has become a multi-million pound industry in Egypt covering the full spectrum from parents struggling to ensure their children get a good start in life to middle-aged wage earners hoping to move into a different salary bracket. **Helen Miles** investigates



An English teacher asks a group of twenty adult students to think of all the clothes vocabulary they know. Hands go up, voices shout out, and some start writing the names of articles of clothing on the blackboard. One student writes: 'byjamas,' and when the teacher asks the class to identify the mis-spelt letter, another student substitutes a 'p' for the 'b'.

In the first five minutes of the class, one of the most common problems for Arabic speakers learning English has cropped up — how to recognise and pronounce a sound that doesn't exist in their own language.

It is a relatively small point among the myriad of rules and pitfalls a new language contains. But these students, like countless others in Egypt, are determined to master the subtleties of English. For them, it's a ticket to success; to job promotion, to business opportunities, to travel prospects and social mobility.

English is everywhere. On street signs, neon billboards, and television screens; in legal contracts, product specifications and the halls of academia. Almost everyone speaks it even at the rudimentary level of street children shouting: 'What's your name?' and taxi drivers asking: 'Where you go?' to passing foreigners. But more and more people are realising that if they want to go anywhere or be anything they have got to do better than that.

"I couldn't do my job without English," said Amin Mohamed, a 23-year-old part-time English student who works as a financial manager at his father's shoe company. "Most of the information about shoe models and the catalogues which come from abroad are written in English. Also, when I travel abroad to look at designs and leather I must speak English."

Ibrahim Rifaa', a 46-year-old credit manager at a five star hotel, has been studying English for a year. His employer picks up the bill. "It's essential for my job," Ibrahim said. "I have to deal with foreigners and solve their problems. I also have to read financial statements and reports that are in English."

"Almost all organisations, from banks to private companies and businesses need English," said Dr Abdel-Moneim Hassan, who has been teaching English at secondary school and university level since 1949. "Employers evaluate applicants on the number of languages they have. English is now an international language and you can't do without it."

The use of non-native languages, however, is not a new phenomenon in Egypt. By dint of a series of foreign rulers, Egypt has long been a multi-lingual society, at least among the educated elite who spoke Turkish (under Ottoman rule) and then French and English, rather than Arabic. Strict social stratification and a lopsided attitude to opportunity meant that the middle and upper classes attended private schools where European languages were spoken, while the less privileged — if they went to school at all — learnt only Arabic.

After the revolution these language schools for the elite were nationalised and the foreign teachers were often replaced by newly disposed members of the bourgeoisie whose fluency in at least two, if not more, languages fully compensated for the absence of native speakers.

Language teaching, however, took a severe blow with President Anwar Sadat's Open Door Policy. The policy provided teachers with more challenging opportunities in the private sector and better salaries, divesting the schools of talented teachers.

At precisely the same time as proficient language teaching was most needed, qualified staff were not around to provide it. Dr Moneim, a professor at Ain Sham's faculty of English, said that from the early 1970s onwards, standards of English teaching began to deteriorate.

"In 1960, we had no more than 15 students per class and we interviewed potential students to see if they would fit the department," said Dr Moneim. "After 1973, the role of the West in Egypt increased, and more and more people wanted to learn English."

The result was that classes became larger, more unwieldy, and standards dropped. Now a typical university class contains 75 students, making individual attention and the teaching of communicative skills almost impossible.

According to Dr Moneim, the problem can be traced back to schools, where low teacher:pupil ratios, an exam-oriented system, and the curse of extra-curricula private lessons, mean students rarely master an even basic knowledge of the language.

The decline of teaching standards within the government system has lead to the growth of private language schools aimed at adults who need to catch up on what they have missed at school.

Colin Rogers, director of the International Language Institute (ILI), arrived in Egypt at a time when the Open Door Policy was not only depriving schools of their English teachers, but also when governmental and private business groups were realising they lacked the basic skill needed to form close ties with potential investors.

"On our [ILI's] first day, when the building was barely finished, the police came of their own accord to keep the crowds back," said Rogers. "But the students still managed to dent the metal doors. We were absolutely flooded and enrolled 1,000 students in one day."

More than twenty years later, the demand for English lessons is going through another resurgence as the privatisation process gets underway and Egypt's infrastructure and communications network — not to mention its freer economic policies — allow better and wider connections with foreign businesses.

This renewed interest means drastic action must be taken to ensure that English teaching improves qualitatively, not just quantitatively. The Ministry of Education acknowledged the importance of a sound grounding in English by introducing compulsory English teaching at the primary stage in both private and governmental schools — previously children only started to learn English in preparatory school.

"English language is a window through which our children and youth can look into the future," said Education Minister Dr Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin. "If our students are to deal with advances in the sciences then they must have a good understanding of English."



"English language teaching is a window through which our children and youth can look into the future. If our students are to deal with advances in the sciences then they must have a good understanding of English."

Fourth and fifth grade primary school pupils now study English for more than two hours a week, increasing to about three and a half hours at the preparatory stage, and more than four hours, or six lessons a week, in secondary schools.

The new system means the ministry is nearly 10,000 English teachers short. Consequently English faculties in universities are being expanded and graduates from other faculties will be allowed to teach if they show competence in the language and receive an extra year's training.

It is hoped that these changes, along with a thorough revision of the syllabus, new text books, revised teaching methods, and scholarships for teachers to spend up to six months in schools abroad, will ensure that things get better.

The need to shakeup English language teaching in schools is acknowledged on all sides. "Students come to us and we ask them how long they have been studying English and they say: '15 years'," said Dr Adel Nada of the ILI, a chain of English language schools for adults. "But their heads are full of rubbish. It takes a long time to unravel the mess."

"Students have often been taught the rules of the language very thoroughly. They probably know the grammar rules better than I do, but they have not been taught exceptions to the rules and they have never learnt to speak and use what they have been taught," said Nevine Hussein, an English teacher at the American University in Cairo's (AUC) Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE).

English classes for adults are filled with eager young professionals who want to do better at work. Graham McCulloch, director of the teaching centre at the British Council, said that the fastest growing sector is English for Special Purposes (ESP). In other words, English classes which are tailored to suit the needs of a particular profession. Hence, bankers focus on the vocabulary of economics, and engineers learn how to read technical reports.

"ESP has taken off in the last 18 months because Egypt is facing more competition from overseas and therefore there is a greater need to conduct business in English," said McCulloch. "Our students tend to be young professionals whose average age is 25, but we get students of all ages; students as young as 16 to people in their 50s. An increasing number of these students are sent to us by their firms."

Of the 3,000 students who study on site at the British Council, 500 are sponsored by their employers. Teachers go out to instruct a further 500 in their offices.

The situation is similar to the AUC's CACE where about 15 per cent of the 20,000 students per year who receive English tuition on campus, are sponsored by their companies. The centre also gives classes to a variety of governmental and private concerns from hotels, to ministries and petroleum companies.

The road to English fluency, however, is not all plain sailing. It is a long and difficult journey which takes years of application and determination. But Egyptian students have certain strengths that help them reach their goals.

"When it comes to language, Egyptian students excel on the fluency side," said Charlie Walker, assistant director of studies at the British Council. "They are very talkative and are not worried about making mistakes — a fact that distinguishes them from other nationalities, such as the Japanese, who are extremely difficult to draw out."

Another advantage is that Egyptians generally have excellent memories, according to Christine Zaher, director of English studies at CACE. "As a result of years of rote learning in schools, Egyptian students are very good at memorisation. In learning a language, memory is one of the vital components — there is no point in sitting and learning grammar structures if you don't have the vocabulary to go with it."

Attitudes picked up at school, however, can impede the learning process. "Egyptian students are very exam oriented and confuse their goals," said Nevine Hussein, who has been teaching for 12 years. "They want to succeed in their exams even if it means cheating, which contradicts what they are trying to do which is to be proficient in English."

Moreover, it is extremely difficult to become proficient in a language unless you are using it every day. Students who attend private classes only get about three hours of English a week and unless they use English at work, they have few other opportunities to practice outside the classroom.

Nevertheless, adult learners tend to be highly motivated, which is just as well since English lessons do not come cheap. Prices range from LE55 for a 24 hour course to LE350 for 48 hours.

Conversely, the high demand for English teaching also means that cowboy outfits spring up, providing sub-standard services, using unqualified teachers, out of date text books, and ineffective teaching methods.

Some schools, such as the ILI, believe that providing native speakers is sufficient in itself — without insisting that they have teaching qualifications. Others have stiffer recruitment policies and a system of continuous teacher monitoring and training.

Students, however, are advised to check that they are tested properly (both orally and written) so that they are not put in mixed-level classes; to ensure the class size does not exceed 20 students; that lessons are properly structured and organised, and that text books are not the only medium of instruction.

But once past the initial hurdle of choosing a suitable course, the rewards of learning a new language are indisputable. Selim Soliman is a case in point. Soliman came to the British Council at the age of 16 to work as a cleaner. After a year, employees were offered a free English course and Soliman seized the opportunity.

"My understanding of English was rudimentary and I was put in the first level," said Soliman, 31. "But I was immediately better than the others because I was around English people 32 hours a week, because of my job, and I was learning very quickly."

Soliman, who is now a receptionist at the council, recently applied for a job working in a tourist company — just to see if he stood a chance. "I was chosen above all the other candidates even though they were much more qualified," he said. "They chose me because my English is better."

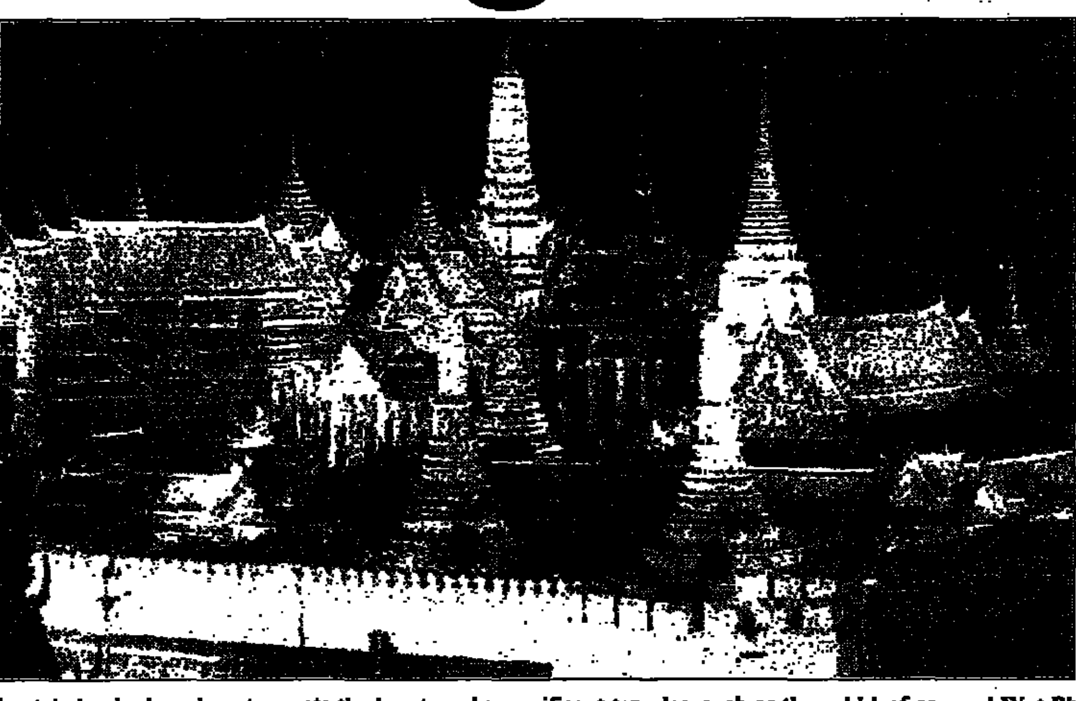
Edited by **Fouad El-Gawhary** and **Tarek Atia**

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On the edge of darkness

Tarek El-Tablawy explores a metropolis precariously balanced on the dividing line between tradition and modernity, beauty and veiled despair







Thailand itself could be considered a fairy tale land where beauty meets the beast, and magnificent temples, such as the gold leaf-covered Wat Phra Kwae, are built. But as with all fables, decay festers on the periphery, awaiting the magic wand of modernisation to transform this run down house on one of the *klongs* into a new housing project

Thirty hours squandered on a plane ride, being jostled repeatedly during the flight by the hefty lady wedged in a seat beside me, whose size apparently was not indicative of her bladder capacity, did little to whet my appetite for my first day in Bangkok.

And four hours after my arrival in Bangkok, as I wearily rested my head in my hands while seated at a river-side table in the world-renowned Oriental Hotel, the only thing I could think of was returning to bed.

My momentary lapse into self-pity, however, was shattered by a gentle voice saying, "*Sawadeeka*" (welcome). Prying my head from my hands, I glanced up in search of the owner of the voice. My eyes rested on a delicate young lady clad in a tight, wrap-around biege and burgundy silk blouse and skirt. She placed her palms together, drew her hands level with her chin in the traditional Thai greeting.

Balanced in her hair was a purple and white orchid, the same kind of flower that stood before me in the cream-coloured bud-vase and also adorned the various nooks and crannies of the open-air restaurant. Casting a cursory glance at the menu, I ordered a bowl of fresh fruit, juice and finally a traditional staple, *Tom Yung Kung*, a spicy shrimp broth flavoured with lemon grass and vegetables.

As I awakened from my fitful slumber I took in my surroundings while waiting for my brunch. Bangkok's Oriental Hotel, the grandfather of luxury hotels, is nestled along the eastern bank of the Chao Phrya River, the River of Kings. The hotel's history is nearly as old and colourful as that of its host country. For more than 100 years, the Oriental has been the temporary residence of countless heads-of-state and such noted authors as Ernest Hemingway, Barbara Cartland and most significantly, Joseph Conrad, whose novel, *Lord Jim*, has been adopted as the name of the hotel's main restaurant. The original Oriental, now a collection of suites, is called the Author's Wing.

Seated alongside the river, sipping my drink while engulfed in a wave of humidity, noise from the river traffic and the scent of flowers, I found myself lapsing into an introspective frame of mind. As an avid reader of Conrad and a believer in his concept of man's underlying heart of darkness, I could literally see the author drinking tea by the river while attempting to capture in words the essence of man's dichotomous nature.

From the subdued luxury of the hotel, the heart of darkness is merely a disturbing, albeit illuminating illusion, but as I would later discover, a quick boat ride up the Chao Phrya brings the picture into sharper focus. Intersecting the river are countless narrow, tree-lined canals called *klongs*. Emerging between the trees are rows of run-down shacks, small Buddhist temples called *wats* and levels of poverty not evident in other parts of the Thai capital.

As the restaurant began to fill up, a middle-aged American walked up and asked if I minded sharing the table as there were no other seats available. Nodding distractedly, I waited for him to settle into his chair. Mike, an architect from New York, had been in Bangkok for about two weeks, and already had the opportunity to explore a fair bit of the city and the surrounding countryside.

This was his eighth trip to Thailand since 1971, when he was an infantry combat soldier stationed in Vietnam.

"Bangkok is often dubbed the City of Angels," he said. And casting an appreciative eye towards Maili, the smiling hostess who moments before had taken my order, he added, "It's not hard to understand why."

But, he assured me, there's more to Thailand than beautiful women. The *wats*, many of which are centuries old, offer a glimpse into the search of inner peace and spirituality that serves as a spring-board for the lives of many Thais.

The arrival of the food drew our conversation to a temporary end. Between mouthfuls of the liquid-fire that had been so subtly named soup, I began to lay plans for the remainder of the day.

After promising Mike to meet at seven in the lobby for dinner, I paid my bill.

Comfortable as the Oriental was, I had no intention of spending the afternoon flirting with waitresses and drinking fruit juices. Ever the adventurous soul, I decided to venture into Bangkok proper and flirt with waitresses in other restaurants. Stepping outside the marble lobby, I had my first glimpse of the city. Having been caught up in the sombre spirit of Conrad's works, as well as Mike's enticing descriptions of the city, I bravely approached the line of Toyota cabs parked outside the hotel, waiting for unsuspecting *farangs* (foreigners). Upon questioning the driver about the fare to the centre of town, his response was: "For you, very cheap". He then quoted a figure that approached the trade deficit of a small Latin American nation. Convinced I would fare better by flagging a ride a block or so away from the hotel, I decided to take my life into my hands and ride a *tuk-tuk*. *Tuk-tuks* are basically rickshaws with souped-up motors, but while an accident in a foot-powered rickshaw is unlikely to result in any major bodily injury, these Satanic-inspired death-traps will, in the case of accident, leave the passenger looking like road pizza.

Mike, who had assumed for himself the role of my *mentor in this intriguing, delicate land, had assured* me that Thais are a mild-mannered people by nature. "They always seem to be saying, *mai pen rai* (no problem) at every chance." However, my driver, who quoted me a similarly outrageous figure, thereby dispelling any illusions that I, with my blonde hair and six-foot frame, would blend in, was a raving lunatic on the road. As he whipped through the bumper-to-bumper traffic at a mere 70km per hour, I found that my heart of darkness was quickly emerging in the form of a gnawing fear for my life. Conrad must have harnessed his inspiration for his literary masterpieces, *The Secret Agent*, *Nostromo* and *The Heart of Darkness*, from a *tuk-tuk* ride.

Between a series of threats and yells directed at the driver, I discovered that his name was Samart and that his favorite subject in school was physics. *Samart was intent on validating Einstein's theory of relativity.*

Screeching to a halt at the beginning of Silom Road, he cast me an impish grin, pointed to the park behind us and said for some undisclosed reason, "Thi ni Lumpinee Park (There is Lumpinee Park)". Stuffing the wad of money into his pocket with surprising quickness, he peeled off into the onslaught of traffic in a cloud of grey smoke that convinced me that my two-pack a day Marlboro habit would be the best thing to enter my *lungs for the duration of my* trip.

On the surface, Bangkok is much like any other sprawling metropolis. Under a sky that is as polluted as it is blue, the city is littered with multilevel shopping centres which stock both the latest in European fashions along with much less expensive Thai-made counterparts. Strolling down Silom Road, Thailand's version of New York's Fifth Avenue, I passed countless shops carrying incredible selections of wooden Thai *handicrafts from the northern city of* Chiang Mai, ivory statues carved in the most minute and often intimately pornographic detail, finished and unfinished Thai silk goods and of course, most significantly, the leering, make-up smeared face of Ronald McDonald situated under the gaudy Golden Arches of the American restaurant chain.

In *the mood for a more traditional experience*, I headed towards a food stall operated by a street vendor. Confident that enough vaccinations were coursing through my veins to protect me from most intestinal bacterial hazards, I pointed at the grayish splotch on the grill and indicated that I would like to buy one. A tentative bite into the flat, salty semi-organic delicacy answered the oft-asked question: what does grilled cardboard taste like? It was actually squid, prepared in just one of the countless methods that abound in Bangkok's plethora of sea food restaurants and sidewalk stalls. Not wanting to offend the owner of Chez Paper, I quickly departed, and waited *until* I was out of sight to unceremoniously dispose of the squid.

It was, to say the least, a less than auspicious way to begin my foray into the unknown. The day, however, could only get better.

One of the most striking features about the city is the relative harmony in which seemingly incongruous phenomena, places and events co-exist. One can venture off of the pavement, escaping the shoulder-to-shoulder pedestrian and occasional motorcycle traffic into a *wat* and discover an astoundingly serene, meditative quality within.

Tired of walking, window shopping and smiling at everyone who yelled, "welcome to Bangkok" in my ear, I entered the dimly lit Temple of the Re*clining Buddha, one of the* city's most important and beautiful temples. The 40-foot golden reclining Buddha occupies the main room in the temple. At one end of the room is a row of incense holders whose contents fill the air with the sweet fragrance of jasmine and sandalwood. After the overwhelming din of the streets, the hushed sanctuary of the *wat* is a welcome reprieve from the outdoors. I sat for a few moments and again found myself drifting off into thought.

But these thoughts are not of man's evil nature lying dormant under a veneer laid by social*isation. They revolve around* the tranquility of this land, and its peoples' whole-hearted embracing of nature and beauty. This was the Thailand that Mike had first spoken of; a country whose religious and historic tradition had embraced the timeless essence of peace.

The pleasant foray into introspection, however, was rudely interrupted by a French couple who were heatedly arguing about who should stand by the Buddha and who should take the picture. Their struggle over the camera culminated with the flash going off in the husband's eyes and my walking away disgusted.

As I stepped outside again and looked at the sharply sloping roof of the *wat*, I felt a tap at my shoulder. I turned to find a withered old lady smiling and toothlessly muttering something about a massage. Few tourists who venture to Thailand do so without having heard of the infamous Thai massage, a "therapeutic" exercise that generally involves a naked young lady, a *bar of soap and a rambunctious* westerner. *But as she* indicated a small room with a series of wooden beds beside the *wat*, I doubted that this was what she had in mind. Allowing her to lead me to the room, I lay down on one of the beds and attempted to relax. A pair of hands gently began to rub my shoulders and back. And just as I was beginning to feel the aches from my long flight melt away, what felt like a steel vice clamped down on my back. Sure that I was in the process of being mugged, I shot up only to find the elderly lady, alone, smiling and saying: "*Mai pen rai.*" I lay back, and for the next half hour, she proceeded to twist my body like a pretzel with surprising strength.



In Damoen Saduak, fruit and vegetable vendors offer the freshest produce that Thailand has to offer. The Floating Market, pictured above, is but one of the many surprises awaiting travellers who venture into the klongs

My bones, not used to this kind of abuse, produced a noise louder than a tree being felled by lightening. But by the end of the session, I walked away from my first experience with a traditional Thai massage relaxed and astonished.

It was already five o'clock, and I had spent the better part of four hours strolling through the streets, lost in both the sights before me and the city with which I was woefully unfamiliar. I flagged down another *tuk-tuk, uttered a quick prayer and hung on for dear life as* the driver, undoubtedly a relative of Samart, shot through the streets and deposited my trembling body at the entrance of the hotel.

As day merges with night and the setting sun, a distant point of fire against the backdrop of a bustling Chao Phrya River, turns the hazy sky a flaming red and the first real glimpse of Conrad's heart of darkness rears its wary head. While by day Bangkok is a touristic marvel, steeped with history, tradition, grace and beauty, at night, the seamier side aggressively takes over.

After meeting Mike in the lobby, we ventured outside, hopped onto the nearest *tuk-tuk* and braced ourselves. Sensing our apprehension, Vim, the driver thrust into our hands brochures from several massage parlours. "Very good, very clean, very relaxing," he stated confidently. Maybe so, but at that moment I would rather have had a seat belt.

Depositing us at the beginning of Silom Road, he turned and said: "Thi ni Lumpinee Park." Curious as to why nearly every *tuk-tuk* ride culminated in Lumpinee Park, I followed Mike as he led me down the main walkway through the park to a small, dimly lit alley lined with cages.

"*The Thais, like many other Asians, believe* that blood is some kind of elixir or aphrodisiac," he noted. And as we strolled down the alleyway, we passed several elderly Thais who were in the process of wrestling cobras from their cages, stringing them up, slicing them open, draining them of bile and blood and then cooking the meat. While I passed on the blood which one generous Thai offered to mix with Remy Martin as a cocktail, I did opt for some grilled cobra. Expecting an exotic flavour to titillate my palate, I was disappointed to find that all it left in my mouth was the after-taste of chicken.

A combination of heat from the cooking fires, the raw, somewhat stale scent of hundreds of reptiles and the stifling humidity lulled me into an uneasy restfulness. Noticing that I was distracted, Mike queried: "Still thinking about that heart of darkness stuff again?" As I nodded gently, he added, "Listen, there are some things you have to remember about this place. First, nothing is exactly what it seems. The real meaning is often hidden, and no one will explain it to you because *you're a farang*.

"Second, there are aspects of Bangkok that prompts most people who visit here to wax poetic. This is particularly true when you go either to the red-light district or north into the Golden Triangle," he stated quietly, adding: "For me, being here is just like being in Nam — its a reawakening"

The meaning behind his surprisingly candid observations became clearer as we ventured from the park, up Silom Road, into the red-light district.

Patpong, as the area is called, has been immortalised in various Hollywood productions such as *The Deer Hunter* and *Kickboxer*, as well as the Broadway musical, *Chess*, and has now exceeded in notoriety Hong Kong's Wanchai district, which was more affectionately known as the World of Suzie Wong.

Patpong's fame and subsequent fortune truly took hold in the 1960s, roughly about the same time that French and American troops became involved in the Vietnam War. Since the time when American GIs roamed the city on furlough, the street has only grown in size and popularity.

Prostitution is illegal in Thailand, but the fact that thousands of young women continue to ply the world's oldest profession implies that the message is not getting through. Go-go bars with colourful names such as Jugs Bar, Queen's Castle, Limelight, Superstar and King's Corner are overflowing with petite angel-faced women who, when not on stage dancing, are busy chatting up customers. For many of these girls, no light propitious shone, except for the neon signs of the clubs that promised them the opportunity to earn enough money to help their families in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. In stark contrast to the relaxed lifestyle of day-time Bangkok, Patpong at night was the essence of darkness cloaked in a light-hearted veneer of entertainment. As I walked through the street, sipping a Pepsi and pushing my way through hundreds of street vendors selling imitation Rolexes, I too found myself succumbing to the *pull of the music and the carefree laughter coming* from inside the clubs. Mike was right, I could try, but the secrets of Bangkok, the beauty of the city and the country juxtaposed over the macabre blanket of Patpong nights, would continue to remain a mystery.

Heartening news on tourist development

LAST week, tourist officials, hotel managers, tourist village owners, and all people in tourist-related jobs celebrated International Tourist Day. **Rehab Saad** reports.

Hotels of all categories, tourist villages, bazaars, travel agencies, Nile cruisers, and restaurants were honoured on International Tourist Day for their sustained efforts during the last year.

The celebration included a conference during which the importance of the tourist industry was discussed, along with reasons for the heartening increase in the number of tourists to Egypt this year.

Hamed Abdel-Meguid, deputy head of the Association of Tourism experts outlined that the tourist movement to the Middle East began to develop 20 years ago. " *The number increased from* 220 *million* tourists in 1975 to 531 million in 1994 and tourist revenue from 40 billion dollars in 1975 to 321 billion in 1994. "

Dr Mamdouh El- Beltagui, minister of tourism, took the opportunity to emphasise that the crisis in the Egyptian tourist industry is now over and tourism is improving. " In 1993 the number of tourists to fell by 21.9 per cent compared to 1992. In 1994 we realised an increase of 24.8 per cent," he said.

Beltagui added that the same thing applied to the number of tourist nights which increased by 33.98 per cent in 1994. " Tourist revenue as a whole also increased; in the period from July 1994 to May 1995 the revenue went up to $1668.8 million compared to $1123.3 million in the earlier period, an increase of 32.7 per cent."

Beltagui further pointed out that two million tourists arrived in Egypt from January *to August, an increase of 15.13 per* cent over the same period last year, and that they spent about 12 million tourist nights, an increase of 24.39 per cent."

Competition between different investors to develop tourist areas after years of reluctance to do so is another encouraging sign. During the fiscal year 1994-1995, a hundred sites have been earmarked for tourist development. The total area to be developed is 39 million metres square and about 52,500 rooms are going to be established in the coming years at a cost of about LE7.8 billion.

Beltagui took the opportunity to highlight the importance of the tourism industry worldwide in providing job opportunities for youth and as one of the sources of hard currency. "It is an industry that has a major affect on many related industries and services, " he said. "One of the periodicals of the World Tourism and *Travel Council declared, quite rightly,* that tourism has become an engine of economic development in the whole world," Beltagui stressed.

October quiz

Here is the first question of the October quiz:
Salaheddin is often identified as an Arab conqueror and ruler. This is incorrect. Do you know what his nationality was?
Collect the answer *of four questions and then send them all to Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Name...
Address...
Tel. No. (if available)..
Answer to Question 1, issue 241
Answer to Question 2, issue 242
Answer to Question 3, issue 243
Answer to Question 4, issue 244

Post your entry to
Travel Quiz
Al Ahram-Weekly,
Al-Ahram,
9th Floor,
Sharia Al-Galaa,
Cairo.



Too late for talk

Where others see failure reflected in Egypt's second place finish in the Zimbabwe Games, **Inas Mazhar** sees the opportunity to again recapture the lead

After a hearty helping of humble pie and mopping up the spilled milk, the time has come for officials in the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS) to reevaluate their strategy. Although Egypt managed to capture 149 medals, 59 of which were gold, South Africa one-upped them by winning 151 medals.

The Egyptian delegations had expected South Africa to give them a run for their money in some of the events, but the notion of an overall upset win was not popularly entertained.

However, in light of the performance in several events, if Egypt had triumphed during these Games, then more than likely, it would fall in the next.

"If we excel in some sports, then the South Africans and the Nigerians will excel in others," noted Dr Hassan Mustafa, the secretary-general of the National Olympic Committee (NOC). "If we do not realise this soon, we will face grave consequences," he predicted.

South Africa, though a newcomer to the Games, has managed to take the bull successfully by the horns "The fact that they have entered a bid to host the 2004 Olympic Games reflects a firm belief in their organisational, financial, technical and administrative abilities to hold this massive event within their borders," asserted Mustafa.

To further complement its logistical readiness, South Africa is steadfast in its conviction to improve its competitiveness in those sports where other nations excel. Other African nations are fast on their heels. "If Africa is now taking strides to improve their athletic programmes, then we (Egypt) should be moving in leaps and bounds," he warned.

To help Egypt get back on track, athletically speaking, the NOC has announced its intention to work in conjunction with the SCYS in order to effectively analyse the team results from the Games. Emerging from these results is sure to be the fact that the individual events were the sole saviour for Egypt. Unfortunately, the athletes competing in these events were forced to quibble with penny-pinchers in the SCYS before they were granted the budget they had requested. The logical conclusion, therefore, is to focus the funding and efforts on individual events such as karate (5 gold medals), tae kwon do (6), judo (4), weightlifting (19), wrestling (5) and shooting (3), as they allow Egypt the chance to rack up the gold whereas team sports award only one medal.

The next step should be to provide adequate funding for the individuals, but not at the expense of the teams. Moreover, training should be comprehensive, and stress results rather than media hype and fanfare. Finally, instead of complaining about South Africa's recruitment policies, the attention should be directed at regaining the pole position by capitalising on the fact that there are numerous talented, determined athletes yearning for the chance to bring home the gold.





While South Africa dominated the individual events (photo: AFP). Egypt grapped gold in teams events (Photo: Ahmed Abdel-Razek)

Money, money, money

With the pot of gold growing at the end of the athletics rainbow, **Eric Asomugha** notes that many of Africa's top athletes have lost sight of their roots

Four score and several other decades ago, when national honour and debt had some meaning, athletes competed for the thrill of victory while attempting to avoid the agony of defeat. The old adage, "it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game," was the creed of competition, and success was judged not by the number of commercial endorsements, but by the number of records broken.

But the lure of fame and fortune has drawn many of the world's top athletes away from competition for competition's sake, a fact painfully obvious in the 6th All Africa Games. Although this continental championship was designed to bring together the continent's top athletes under the guise of sportsmanship and solidarity, many athletes such as Kenyan steeplechaser, Moses Kiptanui, Algeria's middle distance stars, Noureddin Morceli and Hassiba Boulmerka, Zambian hurdler, Samuel Matate, Namibian sprinter Frankie Fredricks and Ethiopia's Haile Gebreselassie and Derartu Tulu, bowed out for a variety of reasons ranging from fatigue to differences with their respective federations.

World marathon champion Elana Meyer of South Africa pulled out of the Games due to a hip injury. But if her hip was out of place then at least her heart wasn't. She made a concerted effort to provide her country with moral support. Kiptanui argued that he needed a little rest and recuperation period before the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. He had already competed, prior to the Zimbabwe Games, in the last world championship and the Grand Prix in Switzerland. Gebreselassie, who holds the world record in the 5,000m event, cited conflicts with his training schedule as the reason for pulling out of the Games. Others, including Egypt's javelin thrower, Khalid Yassin, skipped the continental championship in favour of the World Military Games.

These reasons may be plausible, but less consolation can be found in the excuses given by those athletes who withdrew from the Games due to financial conflicts. Kenya's 5,000m world champion, Ishmael Kirui, and 800m runner, Joseph Tengelei, were busy arguing with their track bodies, and were unable to participate.

And with Zimbabwe a few hours drive away from South Africa, some of the athletes set out on the last day of the Games to compete in an international invitational competition which offered several enticing awards and a chance to meet British sprinter Linford Christie, who agreed to attend for a fee of $50,000.

Similar prior commitments and excuses affected the football competition. With several key players absent, the ensuing matches were uneventful and boring.

These actions and defections did not go unnoticed. "Too many athletes follow the money," complained Mozambique's Marie Mutola. "They have forgotten the debt of allegiance they owe to the nation that gave them their start. Without the local, national or continental events where many were discovered, they would not have had the opportunity to compete internationally."

Agreeing with Mutola, Lamine Diack, the president of the African Amateur Athletics Confederation, questioned. "We have to ask whether they love their countries and lofting high their national flags, or have they heard of European and American athletes missing continental competitions?"

But whatever, the answers to these questions, it may be prudent to recall that Liberia's George Weah, who plays with AC Milan, returned to his home country to guide Liberia to their first ever win in the African Cup of Nations. Subsequently, he paid off the debt incurred by the Liberian Football Federation to the CAF and the FIFA, and, from his own pocket, covered the team's travel and equipment costs.

Ukraine on the Nile

Nashwa Abdel-Tawab talked to the world's 17th-ranked Ukrainian tennis pro, Andrei Medvedev, who led his country to the Group I Davis Cup Qualifiers in Cairo last week.

Have you participated in the Davis Cup Qualifiers before?

No, this is my first time. In the past, I was busy playing in the ATP tour in order to improve my ranking.

Two years ago, you were ranked number four in the world. What factors led to your sliding to no. 17?

Although there is no specific contributing factor. I'd like to keep the reasons to myself. However, I promise tennis fans that one day, and that day will be soon, I'll be back on top.

How intense did you predict the rivalry to be in these Davis Cup qualifiers in Egypt?

I expected to win, but with difficulty because we are not playing with home court advantage, or with the support of our fans. Moreover, this is not the first time I have played against Egyptians. I've known Tamer El-Sawi (ranked 160) for over nine years. We met while touring in the junior ATP tour. He is a very determined player.

photo: Mohamed M. Lutfi

In comparison to the level of tennis played in the Ukraine how well does Egypt fare?

It is clear that the Ukraine and its citizens pay more attention to tennis, in terms of the players and the courts, than does Egypt. In fact, the first negative thing I noticed were the courts. They were the worst I have ever played on, and do not help the player perform to his maximum ability. The Egyptian Tennis Federation should take steps to improve the courts at the Gezira Club, which hosted the Davis Cup Qualifiers several years ago.

The second negative aspect was the noticeable absence of fans. Although we were not competing in our own country, quite a few Ukrainians turned out for the matches, reflecting how seriously we take tennis in the Ukraine. Even more interesting was the fact that several journalists accompanied the team.

On the whole, however, although I've only observed four Egyptian players in action. I can say they are playing well. In three matches, one doubles and two singles, they embarrassed us. Victory did not come easily — we really had to do our best to win. Everyone knows that this was not a Ukrainian victory over Egypt, but one of experience over genuine effort.

Were there any times in the matches where it crossed your mind that you stood a chance of losing?

Yes. The doubts emerged in two close matches, both of which were against Tamer El-Sawi. In both the matches, which were one singles and one doubles, we had each won two sets, with one tie breaker left. We were both trying hard to break each others' serve, and in one of those moments, it flashed across my mind that I might lose. But this is where experience is useful. I managed to put the thought out of my mind.

In general, losing a match is always a consideration and a possibility, as is victory, but one should never dwell on the prospect of losing or else may find oneself giving up prematurely. Actually, this may have been what happened to Tamer in the last 15 minutes of the matches.

There are rumors that you may play for Russia instead of the Ukraine. Is there any truth to these assertions?

No. This has not, and will not happen. I was born in Kiev, when it was just a Ukrainian city in the Soviet Union. Now, however, it is a Ukrainian city.

Sabre toothed tigers

Out with the old and in with the new, Egyptian fencing has not one team, but two. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports on the changes in the fencing federation

While all eyes were on the Egyptian teams competing in Zimbabwe, the Egyptian fencing team foiled the competition in the 4th African Championship held in South Africa simultaneously to the Games. In one fell swoop, the team managed, for the first time, to crush the other teams and qualify for the 1996 Olympics.

Competing against arch-rivals, Algeria, Tunisia and South Africa, the Egyptian team slashed their way to the gold in the foil and sabre events, and took second place in the épée. On the individual level, Maged Shaker, one of Egypt's professional fencers, defeated fellow teammate Mohamed Fouad. Abdel-Moneim El-Husseiny, who took third place in the event, defeated Tunisia's Hisham Karshor, knocking him out of the running. In the epee event, Ayman Mounir placed second, and was trailed by Yasser Mahmoud in third and Amr El-Tawil in fifth. In the women's events, Nagwa Abdel-Moeti took first place, and will be the only female member of the team travelling to Atlanta in 1996.

Based on past performance, the prospects for the team in the Olympics are good, but their days as a team could be numbered. First brought together in early 1980, the team, which has brought home a number of regional and international trophies over the last 15 years, is made up of Egypt's best and most experienced fencers. Skill, while a main ingredient in their success, however, is not the only factor. The team members are also children of federation officials, and in the untainted spirit of nepotism, have had access to the remaining ingredients for success: French trainers, regular international contact through competition, fencing lessons and intensive, costly training.

Not wanting to fix that which was not broken, federation officials overlooked the fact that the team's members were not getting any younger. In short, a new team was needed. This realisation was proven true two years ago when a near upset prompted the recruitment of a new team along with two Russian coaches who were charged with training the new members in the Russian school.

Already, however, doubts have emerged about the new fencing programme. While history has shown that Ronald Reagan's trickle down economics did not work for the US, the young team members argue that they have not had the chance to find this out for themselves. The senior team was blessed with adequate training and funding, but the new team has received little of what their soon-to-be predecessors took for granted. They maintain that the opportunity to participate in international competitions has not been forthcoming. The federation, in its own defense, has offered the standard excuse — lack of funds.

With a note of optimism in his voice, Fencing Federation secretary Mokhtar Abdel-Shafi, argues that the junior team has tremendous potential, and will have the opportunity to participate in international tournaments before the 2000 Olympics.

Others, however, like Maged Shaker, believe that the federation is caught between a rock and a hard place. It has the option, he states, of concentrating on retaining its position as the region's leader, an endeavour which requires excellence in the foil, épee and sabre events. Or, he continues, it can concentrate on the Olympic level, which means narrowing the scope of competition to only the top few athletes and dishing out cash, hand over fist, to train this select few. The federation, he concludes, cannot afford this option.

While members of the junior team struggle with the federation for funds and the chance to compete in international tournaments, members of the senior team are busy making plans for the future. Shaker, who has participated in several world championships while a member of the senior team, has opted to try his hand as a professional. He moved to Germany, was coached by Frank Holjcha in the OFC Bonn Club, found a sponsor, and is now ranked 38th in the world.

Believing that the hey-day of Egyptian fencing is soon to be a thing of the past, several of his teammates have followed in his footsteps, and have turned professional in the US, Hungary and France. They may have hit the mark in their assumptions given that the accomplishments in the World Championships in South Africa were primarily due to individual experience and determination. But with members of the senior team scheduled to retire after the Atlanta Olympics, it remains to be seen whether the new team will be able to cut the mustard.

Handball over fist

IN WHAT may be best described as a tug of war versus a handball match, Egypt and Sweden played two international exhibition matches in Cairo this week as a part of their preparation for the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. In the first match held on Saturday, the two teams tied, the score 25-25. While the Swedes led 14-11 in the first half, the Egyptians managed to pull ahead in the second half to lead 25-24. A last minute goal by the Swedes, however, tied the score.

In the second match, which was held on Sunday, the yellow cards were tossed out as often as the ball was passed. Despite a powerful performance by the Egyptian team, the world's third-ranked Swedes pulled ahead to win the match 18-15.

The Egyptian team is scheduled to travel to Sweden for another set of matches to be held between 29 November to 4 December. In addition, between 9-14 January, Egypt will compete in the International Seven-Nation Championship, a showdown between the world's top seven handball teams. Egypt is ranked sixth in the world.



photo: Amr Gamal

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Violette Makar:

Words without drudgery

She is a happy diva, having chosen home, family and hearth over the international grab game. Her choice has been vindicated because her future continues to grow out of the past

photo: Sherif Sonbol

"...and really, I'm not enamoured of the profile form at all." Violette Makar, the operatic singer, speaking. "You know, one is in the picture or out. You know, I think I'm out." She smiles, not the about-Cairo smile — theatrical, toothy, aglitter. No, a nice, a real proper smile you can trust.

"You see, we who know deeply about opera are a rapidly diminishing race. Opera has become a high-tech mechanical mix-up of media plus almost voodoo chit-chat which purports to tell everything but, really you know, tells nothing. The few around who now understand it are like white whales who have special knowledge".

Sport has millions of people in the know-how as to what makes the players kick, run, leap in time like mechanical machines. Few, however, very few know what it takes and makes to get a singer running and leaping up to the Almighty High Cs which are after all only a small part of a singer's equipment. "There is the portamento, Oh.." — here, a big gesture denoting a huge technical feat — "and a long-held, high legato for Verdi, a massive build-up for Wagner, and dear little *joli* Mozart and Strauss, the two voice killers supreme. As for tempo" — she imitates famous drag queen non-tempo sopranos — "of course, no names, but there are a few around in Europe who have been behind the beat for 30 years: 'Beautiful me, high up among the stars.' Where are the words, where is the beat, tempo and speed? Where is the character? Great singers are not all in opera. Sinatra can give lessons to most of today's opera singers on how to wrap a song around the words and keep the rhythm going."

A voice adds "Marlene, the Dietrich, doing *Just a Gigolo*".

"Words, words, words", says Violette. "These two, they understood the importance of the words".

The word! Music's absolute skin to a singer. Makar goes on further into her proper territory — singing.

"Opera is a tough world. I'm not your Aunt Leila, an extremely important person who is working on a huge sewage project at Naga Hamadi and has the moral support of the women's press. I'm only Makar, who knows about singing. The voice. It's a queer, specialist feeling to have one that brings people to sit for hours listening to you. Opera costs big money. It always has. But not here. Few care. There are two opera scenes, one abroad in the big old music centres and one here which is another story. In the days of the old Opera House, the two used to merge, but now almost never. The distance between them is widening and the opera here is an island unto itself, expressing nothing but hopes for a future in a wonderland not known".

Violette Makar is very tall. She has her own aura, quite unique in Cairo. Her appearance belies her. She appears on the scene and, like the tall always do enchantingly, she stoops slightly as she talks to you. It is politeness in her case, never condescension. She has colour reminiscent of a siren in a painting by Odilon Redon — like her views on music — from another time, called the past, which she projects with up-to-the-minute methods into the future.

She is not a shred nostalgic. Her heart did not die as Egypt's great great grandpa's opera turned to ashes. On the contrary, she began to build up something new immediately. She sang on but the scene changed, culminating in the new place in the garden of Gezira. She found the battle atmosphere not to her liking. It was 99 per cent battle, one per cent opera, and she felt there was no place for her.

The Redon image shows the exterior. The interior is gentle, shy rather, and not with supreme confidence. She shares this with many singers of the past and present. Singers need support. She had this from her colleague, the light soprano Carmen Zaki, and always from her brother Hamdi Fouad. As the scene churned into battle, she felt abandoned and at an early age gave up.

She never became a sad diva. She did not cling. No one told her you had better go. She herself went quietly but her voice stayed with her. She never retired on the rags and patches formula.

Makar is a fine, amusing conversationalist. She makes references to be reported and references not to be reported. And there are areas she quite happily refuses to discuss at all. She offers all possible help about her career qua voice, musical preferences, but of herself, her family and her life away from music, she clams up, smiling and saying they are of no importance. She's happy, she looks happy. No miseries or rugged passages. Obviously they existed but they are of the past and not to be dwelt upon. It's her creed and she's immovable. She can talk for two hours wittily about Fauré songs which she adores and sang. For her life span between two decades, she gets it down to two minutes flat.

Her curriculum vitae does not interest her. About dates, she's heedless. She's from Cairo, Kubri Al-Qubba. Her family were from the Sa'id and her father, *Conseiller du Roi*. She remembers everything but says it is not important. She adored her brother, Hamdi Fouad, who died recently. He helped her adapt to life's battles and stood up for her to continue her struggle, to be allowed to follow the career of a singer. By her father, she was forbidden. In those days, it was not the right life for a daughter.

She went to school at Notre Dame des Apotres and sang always in the masses. The nuns were her teachers and encouraged her. So she was finally allowed to go to the Conservatorium of Monteverde in Heliopolis. She used to lock herself into any room available in those days and sing for hours alone. She says it developed her young voice and, such was the noise, it finally wore down her father's opposition to her becoming a singer. At the Monteverde school, she studied singing properly with Madame Rathle.

After leaving the Monteverde, she attended the new Conservatoire in Giza created by Tharwat Okasha. And so began her life of being in the light in the era of this great man who has left his mark and his feelings for music on an entire generation.

She speaks of Cairo musically as before Okasha, Okasha — and after. The accent she puts on his name shows where her feelings lie. She began vocally to flower at this time into a recognisable voice category. She was lucky. All the precious gifts were thrown to her. She was tall, perfect in health, handsome, musical, sensitive, with a gift given to few singers of beginning with the word, not the note. The note, of course, was her voice. It was herself, so naturally right in all its various aspects. She had not to bother about it. It was not difficult, not a problem sound to be tamed and mastered, but a piece of herself, like a friend. It was joined to her and only once did it abandon her, dramatically, but not at this time.

The Violette Makar voice was a very big one. From the High C it went down into the deepest tones of the contralto. Only at the beginning did it show registers and she soon removed this object on the way to the perfect scale — a singer's dream. They called her a mezzo-soprano. This was belittling for a voice so long, powerful and grand. It belonged, rather, to a species of female voice called Falcon — French, after a celebrated singer of Paris in the eighteenth century. It suits a type of swooping, powerful sound, highly colourful and thrilling to hear. They encompass most roles in the opera except those called the "dumb goose" roles and the high coloraturas. This young girl found herself possessed by a star voice, a world voice, one that could stand power and command a great house. Such discoveries are of shattering importance to a singer because this thing, this mystery would open all doors for her.

It is best to take stock of her position at that moment. No one had ever mucked about with her voice. Her last teacher, Madame Freuzier, more or less left it as she found it. Its range and tonal smoothness without blemishes offered her a bewildering scope of parts. It was voluptuous but not coarse — southern Mediterranean but not harsh, full and ringing but never heavy, hollow, booming or, as the English say, hooty. Vocally, she had the lot and without the usual drudgery.

She should have begun her life as a national icon. As it was, in 1959 she sang *Mama Lucia* in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the Opera, the beginning of a whole series of old ladies, hags and witches that dominate the mezzo-soprano repertoire. She also sang in *Ballo in Maschera* (witch), *Trovatore* (witch), some concerts which included Beethoven's *Ah Perfido*, a thriller demanding a voice like Leonara in his opera *Fidelio*. She was asked to sing this part but felt it was too high at this time. Sad, because it was a role made for her qualities as voice and actress.

During these years her development grew so she finally went first to Yugoslavia where she sang her first Amneris in *Aida* in Belgrade to rave notices, then to Bulgaria, then to Rome for six months. She studied with the Italian professor Signora Labia. She emerged from her time at the Santa Cecilia Academy with every honour possible and her Masters degree. She sang there as Delilah in *Samson*, Adriana Lecouvreur, Carmen and it was at this time she won the Toscanini medal for singing in Parma. It brought her to the notice of powerful people who offered to help her.

Her voice was new and young, of an exciting, individual timbre. All things of which stars are made. She had this picture, a life of moving, travelling, endless rehearsals, lists of airports at which to arrive and depart. It was the life of the in-motion opera singer. It would bring fame, status and endless hotel bedrooms. She thought, pondered. She had also worked with Silvio D'Amico on *Adriana*. She loved the excitement of new dramatic roles, words to embellish and believe in. She went deeper and deeper, weighing the attraction of two worlds: travelling star or home. Home won. Never did she feel more Egyptian than when she took the plunge, almost against her fate, and took the plane back to Cairo.

She had her reasons. She adored her father, her mother and her brother. The family. She is a person of the house and home. She adored Egypt. She adored everything, and she was happy. And later, a rarity, she adored her husband. Her life map would take a new form.

Back in Egypt she sang Charlotte in *Werther*. At this time, she took to the concert hall and covered vast territories in song and aria. But always the siren songs of abroad gnawed at her.

At this time, she had the second crisis of her life. She had been working Alexandria-Cairo on the shuttle. She felt supremely well. Carmen Zaki's encouragement kept the ever-present dragons of nerves and tension from which she often suffered away from her. Over six feet tall, built for Wagner's Isolde, she was timid and almost helplessly nervous before any appearance. Anyway, on the crisis day, she rose early, preparing herself for a singer's day. Rehearsals, performance. She opened her throat to try her voice and nothing came. It threw her. She remembers standing as if struck in the face by a passing stranger. Once again, she tried. Nothing came. No voice. The big thing down in the throat was stalling. And again she tried, petrified by this time. Not a squeak or a rasping rattle would emerge.

Her wonderful, dramatic, mezzo-fast-becoming-soprano voice had left without trace. She says she was too terrified to faint or even sit down. She went feverishly around the house, too nervous to call anyone. Then she made the supreme effort. She really tried until her heart bounded. Locked. Nothing. The lovely thing she thought belonged to her had gone like a lost wrist watch. And she roused the family. She went to a specialist. Effort. But it was gone. No doubt of it. It seems to have abandoned you, the doctor said. She was taken home. Without doubt, it must make some sort of reappearance. She went into constant prayer. After three days, it appeared. She had not spoken a word during that time, but there it was, gleaming, powerful, shamelessly healthy and unconcerned. But not Violette Makar. She was shaken for life. Never, ever again did she open her mouth to sing a note without the thought of that morning's betrayal. It taught her the true weirdness of the voice, its absolute individual power and perversity. In no way, she learned, did she own it or command it. It pleased itself and it was frail, an errant jewel to be guarded.

The crisis turned her into another person. She thought more of expression than force. From her earliest days, she had come to the conclusion that singing songs and operas began with the words. Words, timing hang to tempo and speed. This became her passionate study. She read endlessly, and found Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner and Bernard Shaw all thought the same. So came the dictum on which she founded her life as a teacher: bind the music around the word and the rest will come as it should, almost by itself. She tightened up her speeds and lightened her life. The words flew and the music flew with them. She had found the true key to great singing.

"Don't be too technical, or they won't stay till the end," says Violette Makar.

Interesting that at this time she fell under the spell of the two artists she said were the really great events of her singing life — Janet Baker, whose voice and art enthralled her, and the French soprano Regine Crespin. These two, she found, exemplified all she sought as a singer. Her love and reverence for them is such that she calls them her true teachers.

At the old opera her active career continued to ever-fulsome notices of her performances. She went to Russia and gave concerts. She returned again to Italy and sang in Parma, Verdi's birthplace. She married. She had two children. Now her voice took on new dimensions and she managed easily the dramatic soprano range. Again came the pull to go abroad. It was more serious this time because her roles in opera had expanded as her voice grew higher.

And so she began travelling again. And always she returned to Egypt. Could she really have gone into the international scene? Her voice said yes. Everyone agreed. Why did she not take the plunge? Was she the laziest woman in town? Obviously no. But she had no heart for the big grab demanded to stay in the big scene. Home always won.

And then the old, old opera house burned down. She shed no tears. Things would go on, but slowly. And so the locust years had begun for Cairo music and opera. At this time, Violette, with her French education, fell naturally under the spell of French opera and songs. And then came the teaching.

She is a happy professor. She has all the necessary credentials and her own individual system of forming voices and maintaining them, rather like very good cars. Keep it all clean, every word counts and learn to breathe. Baker and Crespin were her own teachers. One can almost do it oneself. No one singing teacher agrees with the other. In spite of the undergrowth of disagreement, Violette Makar has come up with some fine singers who bloom on the present scene. She knows how to present singers, cosset them and offer protection. She is a bridge between the past and the future and knows the two worlds which haunt the Cairo opera scene: here — there. She tries to pick the best bits from both. Her concerts for pupils and small one-act operas are the best you can manage here with the scene as it is. She is modest yet steely, and stands by her flock.

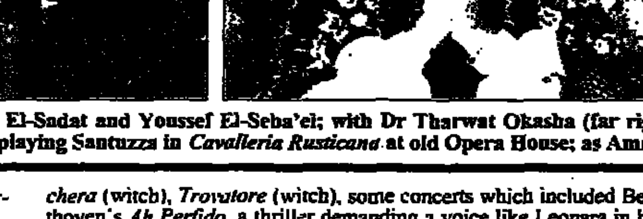
So: could this be the story of Violette Makar, a story without a beginning, without an end, and with the middle sections masquerading as the other two? Words, words, words. Voice is a word, so are courage, gentleness and hope. And the sounds? They are on cassettes, her own. The sound of her voice is captured, a thread of solid gold weaving in and out of a strange electronic mass of mixed noises. As recordings they are more than primitive. But there at the centre — her voice. Nothing can smudge its wonderful loud thrust. Operatic. Nothing has removed the timbre. It is like listening to Emma Calve on Mapleson cylinders. There she is, inimitable, and in one particular excerpt from *Faust*, the voice is positively lambent, elegiac and tragic. Her voice has transcended any mechanical shortcomings of recordings with the beauty and profound portrayal of the betrayed Marguerite. Crespin and Baker are vindicated.

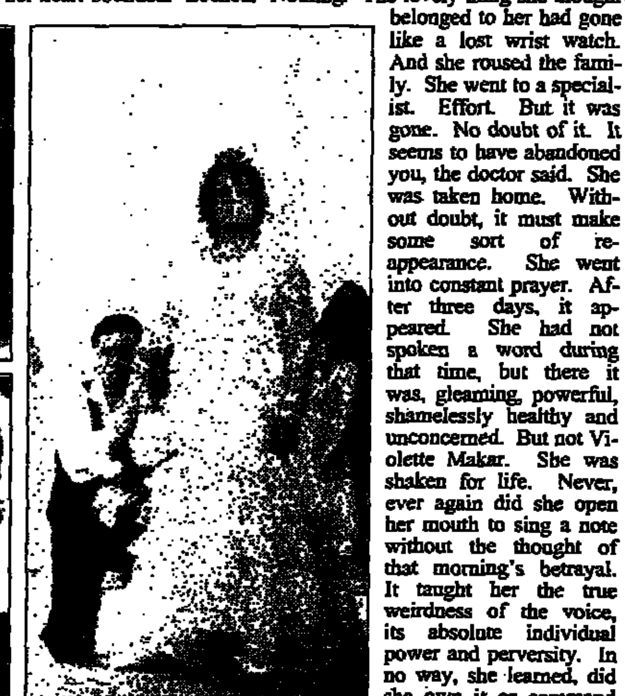
Better to leave the Cairo Opera Mysteries to detective stories and hope that one day, we will see as audience people dressed in sneakers, jeans and open-necked shirts.

She, Violette Makar, hopes so. She represents the best of both worlds. Her story is almost the story of twentieth century classical music in Egypt. What resources — and so...









Clockwise from top, left: with Jihan El-Sadat and Youssef El-Seba'ei; with Dr Tharwat Okasha (far right) and late mentor of opera singers, Mme Rathle (centre); Violette as Carmen; playing Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at old Opera House; as Amneris in *Aida*

Profile by David Blake

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



El-Beltagui (far left) congratulates Borgesius

(l-r) Fadi Yazbak, El-Zoghbi, Sabah, Mrs El-Zoghbi, Sherif, Mrs Sherif



Nihal

♣ **Mowaffaq Abul Nil**, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Aswan called me a few days ago with the best of news. My good friend tells me that at the beginning of next year, an international sculpting festival will take place in Aswan, with artists from 20 countries taking part. Minister of Culture artist **Farouk Hosni** and Aswan's governor **Salah Mishah** have decided that the founding symposium will be held from 1 February to 30 March. A committee of prominent artists and sculptors have already visited Aswan and met with **Ahmed Nawar**, head of national centre for plastic arts and **Salah Mishah** to pick out sites from where rocks could be cut to provide raw material for the artists during the festival. The artists' works will be shown in Aswan's Flower garden, overlooking Nile, and at the end of the festival, their works, or parts of them, will be left as a gift to the city, gradually turning the garden into Egypt's first international open air museum. The event will be funded by the Ministry of Culture and the governorate of Aswan, who will also provide the tools needed. Internationally renowned Egyptian artist **Adam Henein** will head the festival's artistic executive committee, and will be assisted by sculptor **Farouk Ibrahim**. The committee will consist of **Mohamed Shoukri, Abdel-Meguid Abdel-Ghani, Yousri Hassan, Sabri Nashed** and **Gaber Hegazi**.

❤ What better way to spend an evening than to sip cocktails, nibble on *sushi* and *sambousas* and listen to a band especially flown in from Brazil. Yes, dears, if any hotel knows how to celebrate it's silver anniversary in style, then the Cairo Sheraton is that hotel. Hundreds of guests gathered around the hotel's pool last Saturday night to eat, drink and be totally awestruck by the marvellously daring dances provided by a brazen Brazilian band. Wherever I looked I was met with familiar faces, ranging from Minister of Tourism **Mamdouh El-Beltagui** and the Lebanese Minister of Health **Marwan Hamada**, *Al-Akhbar's* **Ahmed Ragab**, renowned veteran *Al-Ahram* columnist **Anis Mansour**, to the more glamourous actresses **Youssra, Leila Oloui** and **Elham Shahin**, actor **Hussein Fahmi** and singer-actress **Sabah**. Not to mention, a varied cocktail of Egyptian and foreign diplomats, ministers and businessmen

As **Hisham Abbas** and **Dina** the belly dancer took over from the Brazilian dancers, I chatted with **Sami El-Zoghbi**, ITT Sheraton Cooperation's senior vice-president for Africa and the Middle East, the Cairo Sheraton's General Manager **Adel Sherif** and my good friend Public Relations Manager **Nesrine Sadek**.

♦ Two great things came out of last week's World Tourism Day, dears. Congratulating a proud **Rudolf Borgesius**, the hotel's general manager, Minister of Tourism **Mamdouh El-Beltagui** named Le Meridien Heliopolis as the number one hotel in the Heliopolis area — even though I could have told him that years ago. The second marvellous piece of news is that my dear, wonderful friend, **Nihal Zamzam**, is now holding the rather grand position of the hotel's public relations manager. And very competently, too, I might add.

A memorial service for William W. Harrison will be held on Wednesday 11 October, at All Saints' Cathedral, Michel Lutfallah Street, Zamalek, at 7:00pm

